

BT
382
B7

Paul G. Bretscher

THE
WORLD

UP-
SIDE
DOWN
OR
RIGHT
SIDE
UP
?

Concordia

Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri
Concordia Publishing House Ltd., London, E. C. 1
© 1964 Concordia Publishing House

Second Printing 1966

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 64-7927

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To Pooky, my Wife,

and to Prisca

Bethel

Paul

Sarah

Monica

Rachel

Joel

Seth, and

Nathan,

from whom I have learned

a great deal

FOREWORD

The Christian Gospel suffers from a great disadvantage. Though it has always been the "good news," with the passage of time it has also become the old news. Words of nineteen hundred years ago that were once fresh and stark become dulled with the passage of the centuries. A patina of age settles upon them. Our ears and minds are lulled by too much repetition — in church services, in our own private reading. It takes a strong effort of the imagination to hear the Gospel as it was heard by those to whom it was first addressed.

Thus it is that one of the perennial tasks of the Christian writer is to restate the Gospel in language that will be powerful and arresting. He does not create a new Gospel; he simply finds new words in which to express the everlasting one, and show its relevance. In recent years a handful of writers have been successful at this. One thinks preeminently of C. S. Lewis and of J. B. Phillips. But their ranks are pitifully small. More recruits are needed. In *The World Upside Down* Professor Bretscher shows strong indications that he is joining this small and desperately needed company of Christian authors.

One of the best ways to convey the Christian Gospel is to find some basic comparison that will present the Gospel

in terms of everyday human experience. Professor Bretscher has hit upon an unusually effective one. He points out that the lens of a camera inverts everything it sees. He goes on to say that scientists have experimented with devising special glasses that will do the same thing. What they have discovered is that the wearers of the glasses are very confused at first but after a short time adapt to seeing the world upside down and have no trouble making their way about in it. Professor Bretscher then goes on to point out that if one wore such glasses long enough it would become an article of faith that the world is indeed upside down. Any arguments to the contrary would provoke incredulity or violent opposition.

By analogy this illustrates what Christ did. He came into a world that was viewed upside down because of sin and man's alienation from God. He walked as one who was in a right relationship with God and saw reality right side up. From the viewpoint of humanity in general this meant that Jesus Christ was an odd, perverse person, who insisted on proclaiming a topsy-turvy world. This, then, is the basic metaphor that determines the structure of Professor Bretscher's small but brilliantly compressed book on the Beatitudes.

It is no accident that in the very earliest days of Christianity the complaint was made — "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Acts 17:6). The author of *The World Upside Down* carries on this ancient Christian tradition. He is inspired by the conviction that the Christian faith makes no sense unless one assumes that man's familiar mode of vision is inverted and that Jesus Christ has come to convert it right

side up. Throughout the book the contrast is powerfully and skillfully developed. For example, there is the question of conformity. Jesus' words are: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The corresponding beatitude of the upside-down world is: "Blessed are those who are accepted for being so agreeable, for they sit on top of the world." As he examines each of the Beatitudes and its upside-down equivalent, Professor Bretscher is concerned to do two things — to help the reader understand how upside down his sight actually is, and to help him perceive how the world would appear if he permitted the great oculist to restore his sight to God's kind of normality.

Such is the basic approach of Professor Bretscher. He wastes no words; at the same time he makes an unusually effective use of examples and illustrations from daily life. Many instances of upside-down vision are picturesquely drawn from his observation of his nine obviously delightful children. Their daily activities have greatly aided him in writing the book. Other examples are taken from ordinary experiences in business and professional life, in politics and in the affairs of nations.

The book is a well-balanced one. The author does not pretend that the upside-down world is completely evil. He sees, even in the unredeemed world, much that is valid, such as man's quest for justice and his impulse to direct his creativity toward all conceivable ends. Even an upside-down world is not devoid of the presence of God.

Another striking thing about this book, as compared with many other religious works, is its psychological astuteness. Professor Bretscher does not write like one

who has sat in an ivory tower and meditated on the motivations of men. Perhaps his large family has given him especially good opportunities for observation — but whatever the reason, he understands people in the way a gifted novelist might. He never seems to be talking about remote or theoretical questions but always strikes close to home in what he says.

There is also a pleasant and sometimes brilliant turn of phrase in this tiny book — as for example when the author states that the modern world encourages us to be exceptional but “never be too exceptional.” At times one thinks of the understated but probing insight of Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*.

At any rate, this is a book which has given me great delight to read. I find it a fresh presentation of old truths, and now that I have finished it many of its points and examples linger powerfully in my memory. One can hardly ask more of a book than that.

CHAD WALSH

To Our Children

It is easy for you right now to be delighted that I have written a book "about us," as I have heard you say. When you are old enough to read it for yourselves, I hope you will not stop being delighted. It may not be so easy then, however.

For one thing, you will discover that this book is not really about you after all, even though it tells some of the things you once did and said. It is really about me, about people, about everybody. I am grateful to you for having been children and for acting like children; you have helped me understand so much better this natural "flesh" (that's a Bible word) with which we are born into the world — what its attitudes are, and why it reacts the way it does.

No adult could have taught me this in quite the same way. By the time you are able to read this, you will begin also to understand what happens to people as they "grow up." They begin to put on a disguise. We all do this. We learn what kind of behavior is acceptable to people, what kind makes a good impression, and we "put on" that kind of behavior. In doing this we do not really change those feelings and reactions which reflect the real "self" hidden inside of us. We only cover and suppress

them, so that the person we present to the world becomes an artificiality, conformed to the image of what we think is expected of us. That is the trouble with adults. The more successful they get at this kind of playacting, the harder it is to really know them. The beauty of a child is that he has not learned this technique yet. Because you were children in the moments which I describe now and then in this book, you did what was in your heart and said what came to your mind, without any pretense or disguise. Through you I have had the chance, and still have it, to discover in a measure what I am really like inside, and what other people are like, and what their tensions and battles are in the world I call "upside down."

The other thing that may make this book difficult for you is that it is not particularly complimentary. As I look it over, I find that I haven't said very much about you that the world would call "good" and "nice." This was not intentional on my part. It just worked out that way. But when I now ask myself why it worked out that way, the answer is not hard to find. When I wanted to learn and understand what the real "good" was that belongs to the world right side up, I could not really learn it from looking at you any more than I could learn it from looking at myself. Certainly you have, on occasion, done some sweet and lovely things. If I strained myself, I might even be able to remember some of them. But the "good" things you did were never as useful for my purposes as the "bad" ones were. Do you see why? It is because the good we do is always ambiguous. I mean we can never be sure how purely good it is, how much

love of God and how much freedom to give and to suffer for the sake of others it really reflects. The other evening I had Seth and Nathan on my lap on the rocker in the living room. We were having lots of fun. They kept kissing me — big wet kisses — and laughing when I reacted in funny ways. Loving me was a great game. Now, I can thank God for that very precious experience with them. But, you see, there is no way I could use this love of theirs to describe the new miracle of love that characterizes the world right side up — the love that is willing to bear all loss and endure all suffering.

That love is more than kisses. If we really want to know what it is like, we finally have to go back to the One who lived it out even to the death, that is, to Jesus Christ. I can use you to illustrate the nature of the world upside down. But when I want to show what the alternative is like, what it means to live in the peace and love and power of the heavenly Father, then I have to talk about Jesus. I think that is what you would even want me to do. In fact, it is because I know Him, and through Him my heavenly Father, that I do not have to be ashamed of my children in their sins, or of myself in mine. I hope you will not be ashamed either. Your real Father takes you day by day just as you are. He does not want you to have to "put on," or wear disguises, or be afraid of what people might think. He wants you to have a new heart and grow up in the life of Jesus and of the Spirit that became yours when you were baptized, in the life of the world right side up.

A few weeks ago, you may remember, we were all sitting around the kitchen table, except for Seth who had

illegally gotten out of his chair. He was in pajamas, and over them he wore a fitted robe with a flowing skirt that had once been Rachel's. (Of course he was too little to worry about its being a girl's robe.) Seth had discovered that he could spin around and make the skirt swirl. "Look at me," he cried, "I'm a tornado!" (He must have learned that word from some television commercial.) Anyhow, Joel immediately observed, "You'd be a better tornado, Seth, if you did it upside down!"

Well, I hope that Seth and all of you will be little tornadoes. Even more, I pray that you will be, as Joel put it, "a better tornado" by doing it "upside down." When you have read this book, you will understand that when the Lord turns you upside down, that's when you are really right side up.

April 1964

CONTENTS

	<i>Foreword</i>	<i>vii</i>
	<i>To Our Children</i>	<i>xi</i>
	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1</i>	DIGNITY <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>2</i>	JOY <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>3</i>	SECURITY <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>4</i>	AMBITION <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>5</i>	JUSTICE <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>6</i>	WISDOM <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>7</i>	PEACE <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>8</i>	CONFORMITY <i>Upside Down</i>	<i>113</i>

of the world of ideas, of human attitudes and personality, such an inversion has actually occurred. Theologically we usually call it the fall into sin. So universal is this inverted condition of men that we have become quite set in it. We will resist vigorously any attempt to change things back to what they were, to turn the world right side up again — or rather, to turn ourselves right side up so that we can see and walk in the world as God made it. Yet it is vitally necessary that the transformation take place. The upside-downness of the world is its ruin. Speaking theologically again, we would call it the alienation of the world from God. God wants to be at one with the world, but He will not tolerate or conform to its upside-down character or let us make Him what we are. He is determined rather to turn us right side up.

That is where the Gospel comes into the story. God sent His Son Jesus into the upside-down world, and Jesus walked in it right side up. The people who had to live with Him found this intolerable, and when they could not get Him to walk upside down the way they did, they finally had to kill Him. But some did believe in Him, and thereby were turned right side up, walking as He walked. These included the apostles, who went out and preached that Jesus had risen from the dead, that He whom the world had condemned as upside down was right side up after all, and that it was the world which hated Jesus that was really upside down. People did not find this kind of preaching easy to take either. In Thessalonica they even complained, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also!" (Acts 17:6). They wanted no other world than the one

CONTENTS

	<i>Foreword</i>	vii
	<i>To Our Children</i>	xi
	<i>Introduction</i>	1
1	DIGNITY <i>Upside Down</i>	7
2	JOY <i>Upside Down</i>	21
3	SECURITY <i>Upside Down</i>	36
4	AMBITION <i>Upside Down</i>	52
5	JUSTICE <i>Upside Down</i>	66
6	WISDOM <i>Upside Down</i>	82
7	PEACE <i>Upside Down</i>	98
8	CONFORMITY <i>Upside Down</i>	113

INTRODUCTION

A camera, like the human eye, sees everything upside down. You may recall having seen a diagram of this in school, or in some elementary science book. The light from the top of the field of view passes straight through the lens and becomes the bottom of the picture, and vice versa. In practice it does not matter to us that this is so. When we look at a developed picture we simply hold it right side up.

The optic nerves which carry the picture of what we see from the retina of the eye to the brain do the same thing. They invert the image so that the world looks right side up to us, and we walk through it right side up.

I remember reading long ago of a scientific experiment in which people were fitted with glasses which would make the whole world appear inverted. It is an intriguing idea. Imagine how awkward it would be to walk, if suddenly down were up and up were down! Yet human beings have a capacity to get used to a lot of things. In time we could adjust even to this — perhaps even to the point where we would argue that the upside-down way in which we see things is right, and everything else wrong.

Something like that is the point of this book. In terms

of the world of ideas, of human attitudes and personality, such an inversion has actually occurred. Theologically we usually call it the fall into sin. So universal is this inverted condition of men that we have become quite set in it. We will resist vigorously any attempt to change things back to what they were, to turn the world right side up again — or rather, to turn ourselves right side up so that we can see and walk in the world as God made it. Yet it is vitally necessary that the transformation take place. The upside-downness of the world is its ruin. Speaking theologically again, we would call it the alienation of the world from God. God wants to be at one with the world, but He will not tolerate or conform to its upside-down character or let us make Him what we are. He is determined rather to turn us right side up.

That is where the Gospel comes into the story. God sent His Son Jesus into the upside-down world, and Jesus walked in it right side up. The people who had to live with Him found this intolerable, and when they could not get Him to walk upside down the way they did, they finally had to kill Him. But some did believe in Him, and thereby were turned right side up, walking as He walked. These included the apostles, who went out and preached that Jesus had risen from the dead, that He whom the world had condemned as upside down was right side up after all, and that it was the world which hated Jesus that was really upside down. People did not find this kind of preaching easy to take either. In Thessalonica they even complained, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also!" (Acts 17:6). They wanted no other world than the one

they had, and would not believe that what the apostles were really doing was turning the world right side up.

All of this has been figurative, picture language. In the rest of this book we shall try to make it real. What the difference is between the life that is right side up and that which is upside down becomes dramatically clear in Jesus' own life and preaching. Nowhere is it more effectively summarized than in the familiar "Beatitudes" which open the Sermon the Mount (Matt. 5:3-12). Here the Lord presents some very odd conceptions of what it means to be "Blessed." As we think His thoughts after Him, though in terms of our own world and life, we shall find greater joy and courage to walk right side up in "the world upside down."

The World Upside Down

Blessed are those whose spirits are high, for they sit on top of the world.

Blessed are those who refuse to mourn, for they need no comfort.

Blessed are the aggressive, for they shall dominate the earth.

Blessed are those who are satisfied with their righteousness, for there are more important things to hunger for.

Blessed are those who have rights, for they shall obtain justice.

Blessed are the sharp of mind, for they "can't see" God.

Blessed are those who dictate the peace, for they shall play the role of God.

Blessed are those who are accepted for being so agreeable, for they sit on top of the world.

Blessed are you when men like you, accept you, want you for their leader, and consider themselves fortunate to know you. Rejoice and be flattered, for great is your prestige on earth; for so men have accepted the conformists who were before you.

The World Right Side Up

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Matt. 5:3-12 RSV)



DIGNITY

DIGNITY

*(Up-
side
Down)*

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

But the upside-down world answers, “No!” Rather, blessed are those whose spirits are high, for they sit on top of the world.”

I

It seems absurd — that it should be blessed to be miserable! To be “poor in spirit” means to be downcast and depressed. It is to be burdened with a sense of inadequacy and failure. It is to have discovered how unimportant we are or how guilty, to have lost our cherished dignity, to see contempt and reproach, or even a condescending superiority, in the eyes of all who look at us. Should this have the promise of blessing? Rubbish! We know at least what we crave, what our depressed spirits hunger for! Blessed is the man who has dignity, who can respect himself and have the respect of others, who has a measure of confidence in himself, who is adequate for what he is doing!

A man must have dignity. Take away his sense of

personal worth, and you have destroyed him! Isn't this so? Just recall some moment of great embarrassment, when you lost your dignity and poise. Maybe you tripped and fell in distinguished company. It is not a very dignified posture to look up at those standing around from an awkward, crumpled position on the floor or sidewalk.

People are very solicitous. "Did you hurt yourself?" they ask.

You answer gamely, brushing off all such attention as quickly as you can, "No, not a bit."

You say it even though your ankle is twisted and your body bruised. For you want the episode to end, you want people to forget it. You stagger to your feet and smile through your pain — so that you may recover your dignity. For it was the loss of dignity that hurt most of all. Can there be any blessedness here?

Incidents like this are only minor, of course, and we learn to laugh them off. Worse things can happen.

Some time ago my wife and I were caught up short when our third child, a son surrounded by five daughters, responded to reproof with the complaint, "I never do anything right!" Now there was a grain of truth in the statement. He did manage to get into more trouble, to do more things that were thoughtless, irresponsible, and damaging, and to evade more assigned responsibilities than all the girls together. Maybe his very position in the family, surrounded by all the niceness of femininity, only aggravated it. The point is, though, that we with our constant commands and reproofs were robbing him of something he, even as a child, had to have — and that

is a sense of dignity and personal worth. He needed the support and the confidence of his parents too, and he had not been getting enough of it. Even a child has to have dignity. It is dreadful to feel inadequate and defeated, a perpetual failure!

Worst of all perhaps is the loss of dignity which accompanies the betrayal of our own reputation. We say something which we know must make a terrible impression on those who heard. We present ourselves to the world as decent, honorable, respectable — and then do something which is despicable and which would, if discovered, be a source of public disgrace. So we hide it from people, we want to maintain the posture of dignity in spite of it. We dread the thought that someday we may be discovered, caught red-handed and able to hide no longer. We even rejoice when we hear of others similarly sinful — for it helps at least to know that we are not alone in our vice.

Cursed is he who loses his dignity! Blessed are those who can keep their poise always and through everything so that nothing will throw them! We have to have dignity — we need it more than we need food, drink, and sunshine. Without dignity we cannot even see the sun shining, for all the world is dark. Without it we cannot enjoy even good food and drink, we cannot eat. We must be able to respect ourselves. We must have the respect of the people around us. Subconsciously, beneath it all (whether we recognize this or not) we must have the approval of God. Otherwise it is impossible to be blessed and happy. It is the loss of dignity and self-respect that drives men to suicide.

Thus life becomes the pursuit of dignity. The craving for wealth is one expression of it, for when a man has money, he can frame himself before the world as the center of a beautiful, respected, dignified picture. His rich home, his car, his clothes, and his wife's mink coat are all part of it. But even when he has all this, he is driven to pursue more and more, to acquire more money than he can ever spend — for dignity consists not merely in the possession, but in the capacity to possess, in the power to earn, the skill of mind and hand by which he continually proves his mastery of the world and thereby demonstrates his own importance. A man must excel in something, he must make something of himself. He cannot stand to be nothing.

The passion for dignity underlies even the need to conform. If the girls in the seventh grade start wearing lipstick, then our daughter also will demand it. If we refuse, she is likely to borrow somebody else's at school. The force which draws youth to smoke is the passion for dignity by conformity. When certain music is currently popular, anybody who is anybody and knows his way around conforms to the trend and sings the songs. I took Prisca, our oldest, to buy shoes, and gave her every encouragement to get something substantial for once, shoes whose soles would not break away at the first kick, and which would hold firmly on her feet. "But none of the girls in school wear shoes with laces," she wailed. That settled it. Do what others do, never be odd. That's the way to be accepted, and acceptance is an awfully important factor in dignity.

But the same desire for dignity is responsible for the

drive to nonconformity. When the awareness awakens that conformity is a subtle form of enslavement, then dignity must assert itself in rebellion. A person must be a person, not just part of a system. Society shall not be my master! Thus the boy grows a beard and walks alone or in the limited company of those who share his spirit of rebellion. Here is the irrepressible force behind the self-assertion of the Negro citizen in our time. He has discovered the affront to his dignity inherent in patterns of a segregated society. Equality of educational opportunity, of economic advantage, of wealth and luxury would not be sufficient to meet this need, even if these were immediately achievable. Once he has become conscious of the indignity inherent in all the exclusions enforced on him by a society which thinks of itself in one category and places him in another, rebellion is of the essence of life itself. Where there is no respect of men, man is driven to disrespect himself and to assert himself against the doubt. For in such a situation he has no natural reason to believe that even God respects him.

Thus by work and achievement, by conformity and nonconformity, men scramble for the dignity they must have. With all this there is a final device, the cover of evasions and excuses. A man simply will not accept any attack on his dignity. If he is a failure, he must find comfort in casting the blame elsewhere, in bitterness toward the world with which he could not compete. He must seek the comfort of association with his own kind, and there at least find some degree of respectability, some hope of being accepted, some signal that he is not yet utterly worthless. The man in jail for robbery argues to

anyone who will hear him that the only difference between him and a lot of people walking the streets outside is that he got caught. The alcoholic resists and suspects the friendship of anyone who will not join him in a drink. Sin covers sin, lie covers lie, evasion covers evasion — until a man has constructed around himself a world in which he has some safety, some respect, some dignity. In this world he hides, and the greatest imaginable dread for him is to have it shattered and taken away from him.

What is pathetic about all this is not that man needs dignity. God knows all about that need, for it is inherent in the nature of man, and He earnestly wants men to have it. What is pathetic is the upside-down way in which man seeks it, and the illusory quality of such dignity as he manages to achieve. There are few high moments in life, and these do not last long. The bride has her day, and then comes the drudgery of kitchen and babies, and the romance of marriage is not quite what she thought. Honors are precarious, because the people who give them are themselves seeking them and do not confer them in freedom and honesty. The world the alcoholic builds around himself is no more illusory than that constructed by the rich man whose house, car, and clothes are the emblem of his success. Each seeks safety in his own way and neither really finds it.

For what, after all, is a man? You sweep your foot through the hill which marks the nest of fire ants and see them swarm out by the hundreds. You crush a few on the walk, but who cares? What are they among so many? And what is any one man when you see him in relation to the 2½ billion of his fellows? Who cares that you

live or would miss you if you had never been born or will remember you when you die? It is the art of the mortician to make the dead look dignified, no matter how they have lived or died. The suit is never so neatly pressed or the tie so neatly tied. Yet what a pathetic thing it is that the day of such dignity and attention comes to a man when he is flat on his back and when there is no longer a breath in his body, thought in his mind, power in his muscle, or personality or will in his frame. We can only bury him quickly before he becomes a stench.

The fact is that man cannot create or achieve his own dignity. He can build only illusions of it. He can long for the flattery, delight in the giddy satisfactions of success, and do courageous battle against any threat to his self-respect. But he can gain only a little dignity, and that only once in a while, and he can keep it only a moment. The beatitude of the world, "Blessed are those whose spirits are high, for they sit on top of the world," expresses the grand dream. But like a glittering soap bubble it disintegrates in the grasping. The world needs something more real, a solid blessedness, a dignity that man can really have and keep and on which he can build a life which is neither a delusion nor an evasion of reality.

2

This is the need Jesus fills when He offers dignity right side up. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

He does not deny the need of man for dignity. He only inverts the thing. He condemns the dignity men create for themselves, and confers dignity on those who

have none. He speaks special words of warning against the illusion of wealth and of power, as in His story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), or in the story of the man who planned to build more barns to hold his rich harvest (Luke 12:13-21), or in His encounter with a rich young ruler. (Luke 18:18-30)

But His most immediate battle is against those who cherish another form of riches — the wealth of racial and religious superiority. The Pharisees have achieved dignity before men through their superior devotion to the Law. Since they have attained thereby the favor of men, they presume they have the favor of God. They stand high over the contemptible world of Gentiles and over the sinners whose status in the coming kingdom is at best precarious and marginal. Jesus consistently condemns such dignity. Those who seek the favor of men have no reward except the favor they win, even if their method is that of religious piety (Matt. 6:1-18). "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," He warns the people (Matt. 5:20 RSV). "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." (Luke 16:15 RSV)

✓ [Dignity is thus denied to those who achieve it and granted to those who have none.] "The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31 RSV). "Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness . . ." (Matt. 8:11, 12)

RSV). "The last shall be first, and the first last." (Matt. 19:30; 20:16)

The whole ministry of Jesus testifies to this. A man sick with paralysis, under the judgment of God and men, is forgiven under the protest of the theologians, and his forgiveness sealed in his healing (Matt. 9:1-8). A sinful woman, excluded from all decent society, experiences His love in the presence of the society which condemns her (Luke 7:36-50). He receives sinners and eats with them in their homes and numbers the excommunicated among His disciples (Luke 15:2; 5:27-32). A Gentile woman pleading for her daughter is not excluded from the blessings of the kingdom that comes to Israel. (Matt. 15: 21-28)

This is the remarkable inversion. The principle which demands it is what the Scriptures call "grace." [All dignity that man achieves or thinks he must achieve is condemned as rebellion against, distrust of, and contempt for God.] Man cannot achieve his dignity nor can he hang on to any worth he may presume to have. The very idea is presumptuous. It testifies to his proud independence of God who created him and who, in the case of Israel, has called him to sonship. Man in his defiance of God, even when that defiance is expressed in pious religious terms, is nothing but dust in his origin and nothing but dust in his destiny. He is nothing. The judgment and wrath of God drives him onward on the way, which is and can be only a dead end, until man either confesses his lostness or is compelled to face the shattering of his illusory world and to confront the holiness of God in the worthlessness he tried so desperately to evade. "There men will weep

and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51 RSV). { True dignity is God's gift not man's achievement. That is what "grace" means. It is the dignity of being created in the image of God, of knowing God, of being called the son of God, His heir, His saint. It cannot be achieved. It can only be acknowledged, rejoiced in, and expressed in a life dedicated to God and free of the mad pursuit of the dignity man cannot attain or, attaining, cannot hold.

This is what it means to be delivered, to be set right side up in an upside-down world. It means to be poor in spirit but in that very poverty to be free of the world — and thereby to possess it truly as God's gift. When dignity is the pursuit of man and depends on his achievement, then pride rises high and kills all possibility of love. Then competition is exalted and sets man against man to fight, to exploit, to envy, or to despise. Then man is independent of God, does not need or want God, and turns even religion, even true religion, into a hypocrisy by making it a tool in the pursuit of dignity and superiority.

But when dignity is the presupposition of life itself, when it is granted in the very glory of being a created and redeemed person, then man is set free of the pursuit. He knows the dignity God has conferred on him even when for the moment the world may seem to grant him no dignity at all. Since he is free of that pursuit, his life is released to be God's, to be used to the glory of God. He can love. He can become the instrument of God to confer dignity on those who vainly pursue it or are in despair because it has eluded them. He can be the instrument of God in judgment on the false dignity that ends

with a handful of nothing. And he cannot lose what he has! What man gains he can lose. What God freely gives no man can take away.

How did it all work out? The poor in spirit found the kingdom of heaven — the outcasts, the guilty, the lonely, the despised, the useless, the crippled, the suffering, the friendless, the unloved and unwanted, the condemned. Jesus came to comfort and to heal them, to forgive and restore them, to exalt them to the sonship of the Father and to the hope of the promises, to make their useless lives purposeful in their calling to live out in the world the righteousness of the Father whose children they were.

But the dignified and the proud resisted and resented it. They wanted nothing of the right-side-up world, because they had succeeded in carving for themselves so advantageous a niche in the world upside down.

Should the Pharisee now give up his boast of being the son of Abraham, the superiority this gives him over the Gentiles, and the hope that some day God will make Rome the servant of Jerusalem? Should he grant that the long despised and unclean pagan can in a flash, by nothing but Baptism, be his equal? What advantage is there, then, in being called the "son of God" ever since the days of deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 4:22)? What good is there, then, in the long generations of diligent study of and loyalty to the Law?

Or should the Pharisee now grant equal status to the harlot or to the traitorous tax collector who was willing to sell out his own people to the Romans for the sake of personal profit? Shall there be no recognition for

superior moral achievement? Should sinners have the kingdom of God for nothing, and the Pharisee become a fool? Is not this a disgrace to the very law of God and its commands of obedience?

And what of the rich man? Does he not have a right to his riches? Has not God shown him favor in granting him such wealth? What is wrong with that which has been honestly gotten? Why should not the rich have social advantages over the poor? Jesus ought to welcome the possibility of a few rich men among His disciples! There is much they could do for Him which the poor and despised cannot do. But He holds in contempt all that is rich and strong and righteous under the Law. Is not this treachery against the people of God? And blasphemy against the Law of God?

We find this idea just as offensive today. The name of honor which we earn, which signals our superiority over other people, that is the name we covet and cherish and in which we walk proudly. The girl who is elected "queen" of something or other, the young man who receives a citation as a superior student, the man who enters politics and wins the election, the athlete whose brilliant performance carries himself or his team to victory — such a one has a name to be proud of, a dignity that counts. But the name "child of God," "saint," "heir"? What honor is there in this if it is unearned, if God in grace wants to confer it on anybody and everybody? What value is this in a competitive world? Go to an employer with the claim, "I am a child of God," and he will laugh at such irrelevance. That is the offense of the dignity of the world right side up. At the same time it suggests

a definition. To be poor in spirit means to cherish the dignity of the name "son" or "child" of God above every honor and dignity a man can ever achieve or the world can ever confer. Again, to be poor in spirit is to regard every experience of dignity in the world not as a personal achievement but as a gracious gift of the Father in heaven.

The clash between the two dignities, between the two worlds, was necessary in the wisdom of God and inevitable in the nature of the situation. Judaism did not want to lose its dignity nor let sinners have the dignity for nothing. But Jesus was willing to lose His dignity in the world, to let it all go because He had the dignity His Father gave Him for nothing — the dignity proclaimed at His baptism, the dignity of being "the Son of God." (Matt. 3:17)

See how "upside down" He appears to be! He is rich with all riches as the Son and Heir of the heavenly Father. He is innocent of all pride, of all claims for personal advantage. He has dedicated His life to the truth of God and the deliverance of men from their despair and their life of illusion and hypocrisy. But men tie His hands and arrest Him like a criminal. There is no dignity in that! They spit on Him, make fun of Him, slap His face. That is not particularly dignified either. They lash His back, mock Him as the "king of the Jews," put a crown of thorns on Him. None of us would care for such homage. They strip Him of His clothes, crucify Him, and sit down to throw dice for the garments He will no longer need. What dignity does He have in that? He is crucified between two criminals, invited in mockery to come down from the cross, treated to the stares of the haters and the curious. He dies helpless in the hands of His own countrymen and

of the pagan Romans. Has any man ever been more thoroughly disgraced?

Yet he never for a moment loses His dignity, the dignity that matters. He is the Son of God, no matter how many deny it, no matter what they say. To the word of the Father, clearly spoken at His baptism, He clings. "You are my Son," the Father has said. "*O My Father . . .*" Jesus prays in Gethsemane, and His last word is, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit!" (Luke 23:46 RSV)

On the third day Jesus rises from the dead! That is the powerful declaration of His sonship in the face of every denial of men (Rom. 1:4). He is exalted highly with the "name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:8-11). His is the dignity! But those who crucify Him? They cannot keep the dignity they are so determined to preserve. The last become first, and the first last. The upside-down world is exposed for its illusion and condemned for its conceit. And the life of God is made manifest in terms of the true dignity and glory of His Son Jesus Christ and of our sonship in Him through Baptism. In an upside-down world He has walked right side up, to turn us right side up. Here is the real blessedness, the true life!

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

2

JOY

ΛΟΓ

(Up-
side
Down)

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,” says our Lord.

But the upside-down world insists, “No! Rather, blessed are those who refuse to mourn, for they need no comfort.”

1

It is difficult to formulate a meaningful definition of happiness. Perhaps the best way to approach the question is to ask when it is that we are truly happy. No doubt a variety of answers would be possible. Here are three with which most of us have had some experience.

First, we are happy in those moments in which we receive adequate recognition. Nothing fills us with more explosive delight than the applause which testifies to the high esteem in which we are held by many people for something we have said or done, and which sets us in terms of that “something” far above the rest of humanity. This is the fulfillment of the daydreams of childhood — to have our name in lights, to return from the first lunar exploration, heroically to save a life.

Secondly, we are happy when we have won a battle, and when everything has gone our way. This is the joy of victory, when desire is satisfied, when a goal is achieved. Sometimes it is the battle to exploit materials of the earth — to create something with our hands which conforms to the pattern formulated in our minds. Whether it is the satisfaction of the artist or musician, the carpenter or cabinetmaker or designer, the cook or seamstress or housekeeper — it is real in the joy it brings. But the victory has added zest and spice when it is achieved not over the material resources of the earth but over other people. It is great to dominate the materials of nature but greater still to dominate and establish superiority over other people. The joy of the cook in her skill is increased when she wins a prize in competition. And grown men as well as little boys can find delight when, with no creativeness at all, they have simply shown somebody else who is boss, who is the stronger.

Then there is the happiness that goes with the sheer confidence of being in control of things. The victories of the past give promise of greater victories to come. By skill of hand, strength of muscle, and sharpness of mind we have demonstrated ourselves adequate in the face of any crisis. We can almost dare tomorrow to bring what it will, for we see in it only one more opportunity to prove our mastery of life and of everything that belongs to it.

The opposite of happiness, if we may use the language of our beatitude, is "mourning." Chances are we experience at least as much of this as we do of joy. Mourning is sheer misery, and as much as happiness is

to be pursued, this is to be avoided. When we are not recognized at all but ignored and forgotten and taken for granted, when we have no claim to any exceptional position but are altogether ordinary, when we do not get our way but are defeated in the battle, when the materials of nature which we want to control seem to control us instead and make mockery of our efforts, when in conflicts with people we come out defeated — this is the climate of mourning. The irony of it is that even the consolations of the booby prize escape us. We have no confidence in ourselves but stand in dread of our inadequacy. Tomorrow holds no challenge but only threat and fear. We are weak, helpless, guilty, in pain, inferior, unimportant, and in control of nothing that matters. And the troubles that seem to converge on us as on nobody else drive us ever deeper into despair at our nothingness.

In reality the moments of sheer joy or of sheer mourning are both of themselves quite rare. Most of the time we live between the two, in a sort of gray area in which we are neither miserable nor happy but plodding along and making the best of things. We strive for happiness, but the most we really achieve is escape from falling completely into mourning. We do manage to accomplish a little bit sometimes — and how badly we need this! Even the mentally retarded must be given opportunity to achieve something, however little it may seem to us. We observe this in a little baby. Nathan delights in climbing the stairs, or in sitting on the table awkwardly dropping coins into a little tin bank. It is an achievement, it deserves recognition! He applauds himself and looks for applause from others. So we manage to achieve a little

bit, and some few people are kind enough to applaud and thereby to give us a momentary taste of joy. We manage to be a little bit right, in some things, once in a while, to exercise a small measure of control in limited areas of competence, to be important to and loved by somebody! And if that somebody is only one person, how vastly better this is than to be utterly lonely — loved, recognized, wanted, or remembered by nobody at all!

We live in the gray area. Its satisfactions are minimal, its grind continuous — but it is infinitely better than despair. Here, at least, there is still hope of happiness, the opportunity to battle for it, the “pursuit” which the Declaration of Independence asserts as the right of every man. Perhaps if we work very hard and press our talents to the limit and get a few “breaks,” we can achieve some symbols of status — the better-than-average home or car or clothing. In a child the talent may be nothing more than the high art of crying long and loud enough. I remember the day when it occurred suddenly to four-year-old Joel that he had to have a new coloring book. He begged for it, he cried for it. No rational argument or threat would dissuade him. “I want it right now,” he sobbed. And finally he added the reproach, “Daddy, you’re making me cry!” One morning at breakfast he wanted the Rice Krispies. Sarah got her hand on the box just a moment before him, and with impish and pious delight emptied the last of its contents into her bowl. The more he stormed, the greater was her delight. Neither Sarah nor Joel wanted the Rice Krispies nearly so much as victory over the other. In that moment Sarah had reached the peak of happiness, while Joel could escape

the depths of misery only by continuing the battle and rejecting any alternative.

The difference between adults and children is not in basic drives and motivation but purely in the subtle refinement of method and in the capacity to disguise motives. Every child eventually has this pounded into him by the very battle against society. We adults are not at all unlike Joel and Sarah. We want to be in control, to be right, to be strong — for happiness is the handmaid of conquest. We want peace, of course, but peace brings happiness only when we emerge on top at the end of the battle. Better than defeat is the gray area of continued battle — for as long as we continue the fight we have not yielded to despair or forsaken the hope of victory. Whether the hope is reasonable or not makes no difference. It is of the essence of life that man must hope. It is not of the essence of life that man must be reasonable.

Therefore the upside-down world refuses to mourn. Reasonable and realistic as philosophies of pessimism always are, they never become popular. For man must be optimistic, and pessimism is rejected out of hand. No matter how depressing reality may appear in any given moment, man finds some thread of hope, seizes it in all desperation, builds his life on it, and ignores all else. The vast generalities of human progress become our obsession, but the frightening message of human decay we conceal in slums or in institutions where we do not have to see the judgment that rests upon us. In the midst of war we fervently believe in and expect peace and paradise, but in the midst of peace we refuse to concede the reality of war. We take pride in our grand cities but will

not know that they are precisely the targets of the bombs. We can glory in the achievement of a few because in doing so we can forget the plodding despair of the masses.

Thus all of life becomes a massive strategy of evasion. Any evidence that we are not strong, not wise, not honorable, not eternal we simply will not see. If we cannot altogether prevent moments of shame, of fear, of death from striking, we can at least take courage and do battle — we can refuse to yield to mourning. One device is to reassure ourselves that the dreadful thing isn't really true. Monica was horrified and almost in panic of tension while watching a television story. She came running into the kitchen and asked me, "Daddy, is that really true, or is it only a story?" "It's only a story," I replied. Then she took a deep breath of relief and went back to watch the rest of it. So when some dreadful news strikes us, we find refuge in unbelief. "I can't realize it," people say in such crises. "I feel as though it is happening to somebody else."

Another device is to assure ourselves that the dreadful reality is not really dreadful. "That's life!" "We all have to go sometime!" "Time heals all wounds." "You'll get over it." "Nobody can grieve forever." Or we cover up the reality with jokes. One of the effective ways to evade what we ought to fear or to escape the guilt of something of which we ought to be thoroughly ashamed is to make it the subject of bold and raucous humor. Or we escape reality by pursuing pleasures, by being entertained, by traveling and forgetting, by wild parties, by drink, by the contrived enactment of happiness and gaiety.

All such escapism concurs in this at least that evil must not be allowed to be real, that man must not mourn.

If there is no solution for it, then we must forget it, drown it, ignore it, deny it, disguise it, philosophize it, be bigger than it, pretend that it doesn't hurt. "Keep a stiff upper lip," we say. "Big boys don't cry!"

In the end it turns out to be a vain effort, a useless expenditure of energy. Does your happiness depend on your being important? You aren't. Does happiness depend on getting your own way? You won't, not finally at least. The joy of success is momentary. It quickly fades into nothing but a memory. The stronger you get, the stronger your enemies also become — and some day your strength will fade. You may battle but you will not really win.

Does your happiness depend on being right? How can you be right when so much of your life is sheer pretense — a boast so unreal that nobody but you can see it?

Does happiness depend on your being strong? Strength is a vain show. Have you ever seen a crushed body? Or do you remember how a germ or a single malfunction can kill a man? Or how a momentary lapse into stupidity can wreck your whole world?

Pursuit of happiness is a possibility. Man may cherish his optimism. But he lives always in the gray of evening. The moments of real joy are rare indeed. The laughter is mostly hollow, and finally comes the stillness of defeat.

2

"Blessed are those who mourn!"

The upside-down world cannot but regard this as nonsense. Yet Jesus means exactly what He says. That is

what is so very odd about Him. He will not concede validity to the argument that evil and suffering are unreal. He will not allow men to imagine that they can escape evil by gritting their teeth and closing their eyes. "Blessed are those who mourn!" That means blessed are those who do not erase sorrow but acknowledge it. It means blessed are the pessimists, for they will abandon the pursuit of the impossible. They will be open to the new possibility, the comfort, the salvation of God, the world right side up.

For sin is real — the guilt, the wrongness of every man, his failure to be what he ought to be in his passionate attempt to become what he cannot become.

Condemnation is real — the wrath of God against a world to which He cannot consent and which He will not tolerate.

Futility is real — for the greatest achievements of the race offer no answer in the face of the "So what?" of hearts searching for personal hope, worth, and purpose.

Death is real — for it makes mockery of life and sweat and achievement. The man who lives and sweats and achieves has nothing in the end but the dust from which he came.

This Jesus knows, and that is why He demands exactly what men refuse. "Blessed are those who mourn!" Here lies the opportunity of a hope which is not idle and empty optimism, but which is itself as real as the despair it overthrows.

Jesus is a realist through and through. See it in the way in which He approaches sinners.

He does not say, "We are all sinners, after all," as though this should reduce the guilt.

He does not suggest, "Lots of people have done what you did."

He will not let the guilty off the hook with the concession, "It's human nature."

He will not say, "Try harder next time," unless in condemning irony against one who has not yet faced the reality of his own inherent evil.

The thought "You're making a mountain out of a molehill" is alien to Him.

Nor will He dismiss the whole idea by suggesting that it is the remnant of the animal in man and that mankind will eventually rise above it. He will not dismiss the Law, as though it is only the custodian of a primitive morality, whose ordinances must be subjected to critical reevaluation by an enlightened society.

So serious and real is sin as the fruit of a heart which resists and hates the very nature of God that He must expose and condemn without mercy the hypocrisy of those who imagine they have escaped its condemnation by their superior righteousness. Sin is altogether real, guilt is inescapable, the judgment cannot be evaded. The situation demands mourning, the honesty of despair of self, and to mourning alone can the promise of deliverance and blessing be attached.

So also death is real. It is awful. It is the evidence of the wrath of God and of the kingdom of Satan. Jesus weeps. He mourns at the grave of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). If He says to the widow who has lost her

son, "Do not weep" (Luke 7:13), it is not as though He were saying, "Be brave, keep a stiff upper lip." He says it and it means something, because He is prepared to offer the only real comfort — the resurrection which overthrows death and declares Life to be its master. Nothing less than this can comfort. Anything less than this is escapism.

So also the weakness of man is real, and his boast of power a piece of self-deception. Caiaphas, the high priest and the skillful manipulator of the Sanhedrin, may parade himself as judge of Jesus and in an act of pious indignation tear his garments and call Jesus a blasphemer — but he will face judgment and give an account of every word. (Matt. 26:64; 12:36)

Pilate, with the force of the Roman Empire behind him, may boast, "I have power to release you and power to crucify you" — but if he does not acknowledge that the source of whatever power he has is not the Roman Empire but God, he only deceives himself. (John 19:10)

The rich man may boast of his power to take it easy — but he has not created his life, nor can he preserve it when the Lord says to him, "You fool!" (Luke 12:20 Phillips)

Peter and all the disciples boast of their courage and power to die with Him — but they must learn their weakness when the pressure of events itself exposes the illusory nature of human determination. (Matt. 26:33-35, 41, 56, 69-75)

Man has no strength of his own. The honest thing for him is to endure the pain of reality, to mourn! This is what the upside-down world refuses to do. It is what

Jesus demands. It is an absolute necessity, for there can be no comfort, no salvation, no true blessing without it.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." There is the door into the new world, the power to be turned right side up. This is a declaration out of the pure grace and love of God. It has to be grace alone, for to mourn is to confess the utter helplessness of man to deliver himself from evil. To mourn is to acknowledge the hopeless futility of all man's self-saving devices — his lies, his illusions, his escapism. It has to be grace alone, for now the comfort is not words only but works, not promises but deliverance. The enemy is met face to face on his own battleground, the battleground of a sinful deluded world, the battleground of temptation, of weakness, of death and grave. And the enemy is conquered. God has stepped in to overthrow the evil and to deliver men from their gray misery and futility of hoping into the right-side-up world of freedom, truth, sonship, and eternal life.

This is the story of Jesus Christ. What He talked about He also lived. He created in Himself the reality of promise and of every saving act. If He healed the sick, His authority to do so was that He took their sicknesses upon Himself and all the judgment and pain and exclusion the suffering implied (Matt. 8:17). If He forgave sinners, His authority to do so was that He interposed Himself between sinner and the judgment of God, so that the judgment would fall on Him. If He raised the dead, His authority so to reverse the condemnation of God and to break the power of the devil was His own willingness to die and to unlock the doors of death from the inside.

For this He was sent. This is what the Father asked of His Son and what the Son in perfect confidence of the Father was willing to do.

But Jesus knew to the full the meaning of mourning. The horror of death gripped Him at Gethsemane as He searched with His Father for another way — and there was no other (Matt. 26:36-46). We are so accustomed to seeing the cross as a piece of chancel furniture or of jewelry that we lose all sense of the horror of such a symbol. It was awful — that cross on which He hung with nails driven through His hands, helpless to brush away even a fly. Every pride of man was stripped from Him. He received no recognition, only contempt. He had no strength, only weakness. He was not upheld in innocence but condemned with the guilty — and that even by God, for our sakes. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). The upside-down world offered Him no reason for joy. But the world in which He walked, the world right side up, did. It was the joy of conquest, of fulfilling the Father’s work, of overthrowing by His very death every enmity against God. And He was not the loser. He rose from the dead! There is the true comfort — not to evade the enemy and deny his reality but to conquer him by the trust of the Father. He broke the power of sin, the accusing glee of the devil, the dread of weakness, and the curse of death. He revealed and established in the world the true power of God. He brought forth from His grave the reality of the world right side up.

Thus the mourners are comforted with the joy of the victory of God. But those who will not mourn can only

live on in the great world of self-deceit and vanity forever, fleeing what they cannot escape and striving for what they cannot attain. Those who got rid of Him had their moment of joy, but it did not last long. But the mourners? They found a possibility of joy no man could have imagined. Peter, who mourned in the despair of his weakness, found the joy of true strength in the risen Lord Jesus. St. Paul went through the dreadful pain of discovering that he, in the hypocritical and blind defense of "truth," had persecuted the Lord and fought as an enemy of God. Yet what a joy was his to be turned right side up and to know the freedom of honesty, forgiveness, grace, and calling to a new life.

So be a mourner! Is it not remarkable how the world upside down has convinced itself that *it* is real and the Gospel of Jesus Christ an unreal superstition? It is tragic if the church of God trembles before that kind of argument and forsakes its heritage of truth! There is no realism in the world like that which belongs to the people and sons of God who can look the world in the face, see through its delusions, confront its enmity without fear or escapism! We can do it because we know the comfort, the God of salvation, forgiveness, hope, and life in Jesus our Lord.

Therefore join the ranks of the mourners. When you are confronted with your wrongness, don't take the tack of the upside-down world by fleeing into subterfuge and excuses, evasions and counteraccusations. True, it is awful to discover it and harder still to acknowledge and confess guilt. But do it! Be the mourner, and then be free in the comfort and dignity of the son of a loving

and forgiving Father. From the despair of condemnation lift up your eyes to the cross in which God smiles at you and rejoice that you know Him! Find your hope where hope can alone be found. Be a mourner, comforted! For then you can also become a comforter.

So also when you are faced with your weakness, do not make a pretense of strength or disguise it so that nobody will see. When you face defeat, the pains of old age, frustrations and inadequacy, the dreadful confession, "I can't, I can't, I can't" — then weep and mourn! It is all too true! But now look up and see the Lord Jesus smile and answer, "Then I will be your strength, so that you can do all that I desire of you, and no force of hell can withstand you!" You will know the joy of honest weakness and true strength. As the comforted you will be able to comfort the weak who are still prisoners of their illusions.

And when you are faced with loneliness, do not pretend courage or resolve the problem by force of your own will. It is dreadful to be lonely, to be forgotten, to feel unwanted, unimportant, ignored. It is a time for weeping, not for defiance or strength. But then hear the voice of your Lord saying, "I have gathered you into My fold as My sheep. I will not let you be forgotten. I will come to you. I will never leave you or forsake you." Then, knowing this joy and comfort, you can rise to seek out others who are lonely and forgotten and be the voice of the Lord to them also.

Or when you face death — when some day or night the horror of it breaks through into your consciousness, when it strikes close and hard at one you love, or when

you yourself are threatened and must in utter loneliness look it in the face — this is no time for human heroics, for a brave show. It is a time to mourn, to acknowledge the horror and to hear in it the message of the judgment of God on all the rebellion, pride, independence, and resistance of man. Weep, for God is commanding just this! But then see the cross on which Jesus died, the grave from which He arose, the reality of His promise. Not by philosophy but by history God comforts — the history of His own triumph over His own judgment. For the risen Christ says that you are not dust destined to return to dust. You are the child of the Father, an eternally precious person destined to return to the bosom of the Father, who sent you with His Son Jesus on a mission into this world and who now receives you home in eternal triumph. Not dust but sonship, not decay but maturity, not Death but Life has the last word!

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

SECURITY

SECURITY

(Up-
side
Down)

"Blessed are the meek," says Jesus, "for they shall inherit the earth."

But the upside-down world answers, "No! Rather, blessed are the aggressive, for they shall dominate the earth."

I

To the world upside down no statement of the Lord is more patently ridiculous than this one. Perhaps it is a measure of the unbelief of men, the total refusal to take God seriously, that the possibility of waiting for Him to come through with the inheritance He promises is laughed off as wholly unrealistic. Any Christian who takes this call to meekness too literally will be left far behind in the dust. This is utterly reactionary, a primitive notion quite unsuited to the drive of progressive Western civilization. No man concerned with ordinary bread-and-butter security can operate on such a principle. "Blessed are the aggressive!" That's the way life is, and that's how it must be lived.

We even become irritated with meek people. "Don't

be such a milktoast," the aggressive wife prods her reluctant husband. "Don't be such a spineless weakling! For once in your life stand up for your rights. Tell him where to head in. If you are so chickenhearted, people will continue to walk all over you."

"Blessed is the man who knows what he wants and sets out to get it, who has the courage to assert himself, to defend his rights, press his claims, demand his due," says the commencement speaker as he sends another class into the world. "Be strong and alert, for life is a battle, and nobody is going to fight it for you. Have vision, dream big dreams, think, plan, seize your opportunity. By strength comes achievement, in aggressive determination lies your greatest security."

This is the philosophy, and it determines also the method. Now we must put to work all our resources of mind and hand, with all vision and ingenuity, to prepare for any emergency and to stay out in front of any threat to our well-being. We urge our children to get a college education, for in a lifetime it is worth an added income of \$144,000. We plan wisely for the future. A savings account provides a financial cushion against the rainy day. One must have access to a certain amount of ready cash. We undertake an insurance program — against fire, medical expense, catastrophes, liability, collision, death. We exploit every safeguard for life and limb. We pump ourselves and our children full of vitamins and plan a well-rounded diet in addition. We get all the shots or vaccines that are available against any possible disease. If smoking threatens lung cancer, and we don't want to give it up, we at least switch to a filter or a brand that keeps even

the filter a neat clean quarter-inch away. Perhaps we also get some religion. It is good to get God on our side, to go to church and make the contributions. This is an added insurance in case all else fails. One never knows when he may need God, and it wouldn't be quite right to call on Him if we haven't kept abreast of the premiums.

The greatest security, of course, lies in continued aggressiveness, in the hard running that keeps one a little ahead of the pack, and in the capacity and alertness to do that kind of running. One must maintain a position of strength, whether as the aggressor seeking a new conquest or as the defender of a fortress repelling attack. The game of life calls for vigilance and alertness. Trouble foreseen is trouble avoided. One must know how to bargain, how to bluff, how to maintain a front and never reveal a chink in the armor.

There are two possible effects of such a program. One is that a man finds security, the other, that he does not. Most people don't. Those who take the philosophy most seriously are prime candidates for fears, tensions, and ulcers, for the self they present to the world is bigger than the self they really are. It takes a lot of puffing to maintain the proper inflation. In time they come to trust nothing and nobody. The job is to miss no trick, but never to be tricked. But that calls for consummate deceit on the one hand and perpetual suspicion on the other. This is the source of the aggressive competitiveness, the division of man against man we call modern business. It promotes the grasping greed that sets families against themselves in the battle for inheritances.

And it is all so relative. There is a time in life when

\$100 looks like a lot of money; there is another time when \$10,000 or \$100,000 is all too little. What is security anyway? We talk of national security and in its name invest well over 50 billion dollars of our sweat and labor in armies and armaments. Is it enough? Is it too much? Who can really know? If we become confident, somebody on the national scene begins to scream invectives against overconfidence, and the spiral starts upward again. When does a man have enough insurance, a big enough savings account? The word "enough" is so relative as to be meaningless. There is little if any correlation between the amount of wealth a man has and the security he feels. Security is something else than being strong and staying ahead of the game.

Therefore life becomes a mass of tensions and nerves. We smoke too much, we drink too much, we take too many tranquilizers and aspirins, we pursue entertainment and pleasure as though it were a lifesaver — and perhaps it is. We suffer mental collapse, heart attacks, strokes, and ulcers and do not know how to relax. Advertisers play heavily on the basic human insecurity. Is your deodorizer giving you 24-hour protection? Does your toothpaste prevent decay, clean your teeth well enough, and cleanse your breath at the same time?

What happens when a man who has been strong and prosperous reaches the point where he can no longer compete as he once did, when the world begins to pass him by? He remembers his insurance policies one day when he is particularly depressed by it all and says to his wife in a rather poor jest, "You know, Honey, I'm worth more to you dead than alive!" One wonders whether this

very shattering of security in the face of growing inadequacy may not account in some measure for the shorter life expectancy of men compared with women. It is a fearful form of autosuggestion, whether spoken or not, and the psychological pressures and tensions it implies may make deliberate suicide unnecessary.

Isn't it strange that the nation which has generated more wealth than any other in history should know so little real security? Why do we consume such frightening quantities of tobacco, aspirins, tranquilizers, drugs generally, and liquor? Why do we sit glued for hours on end in front of a picture tube, as though there is nothing else to live for? Why are so many young people, for all their superior health and physical vitality, for all their education, their money, and their leisure time, so dissatisfied with the drift and direction of a life that seems to be headed nowhere?

Most people do not find security for all their seeking. Let us grant the possibility, however, that some do. There is the man who is not afraid. He has it made, has found security in his strength, has built around himself all the necessary and protective devices. His pension program is taken care of, his insurance fully adequate. There is nothing he hasn't thought of. If unexpected emergencies develop, he has every reason to be calm and confident — like the experienced captain of a sound ship who rejoices in the diversionary adventure of a storm since it can only compliment his mastery. He is humble enough to confess, "I had a little luck," but also not unwilling to give advice out of his own experience. "Luck finds those who work hard and are alert enough to take advantage of it." With

quiet satisfaction and self-congratulation he can survey his achievement, his holdings, and his current operations. He has nothing to apologize for, for he has wronged no man in the process but given a livelihood to many. There are no enemies to be feared, no sins to be forgiven, no worlds to conquer, no evaded obligations to be met. His wife loves him and his children honor him and are worthy of him, and he will live to a ripe old age. He has realized the promise, "Blessed are the aggressive, for they shall dominate the earth."

I have not met such a man. If I did meet him, I would be hard put to know whether he is real or only a projected image of what he wishes he could be. Men are masters in the art of hypocrisy, and this makes them exceedingly difficult to know. But again, if there is such a man, he is not likely to be reading this book; and if he is reading it, let him now put it down. Under his present circumstances we have no more to say to him except perhaps, "Congratulations!"

2

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

For the sinners, the weak, the inadequate, the fearful, the insecure these words offer the hope of a completely inverted kind of security — the security of sons of God who do not have to fight to possess the earth precisely because it is already theirs as an inheritance.

The proposition is marvelous in its simplicity. It means that the security of life on earth does not have to be won by hard battle, for it is already implied in the relation God holds as Father to those whom He has begotten and brought forth by the new birth of Baptism.

It means that the earth is a gift, this very earth on which we live and into which we were born, and that it will provide to those who possess it all they need for the support of body and life — therefore the fullness of security. It is exactly for this that the Father has bequeathed it to them.

Under that relationship of children to the Father, meekness is not only possible but inevitable. But meekness does not mean what the upside-down world imagines it must mean. The picture we presented at the beginning of this chapter is a caricature. The children of the Father have no reason to be meek over against this earth and its resources. The earth is given them for no other reason than that they should dominate it and reflect in the exercise of that dominion the very creativeness of their Father. This is quite clear in the Old Testament, from which the idea of "inheriting the earth [or land]" derives. In that ancient history it was the land of Canaan which became the inheritance promised and fulfilled to God's son Israel. As Moses puts it in Deuteronomy, "The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land . . . a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper" (Deut. 8:7-9 RSV). The implication is that they will work the land, cultivate the trees and crops, mine the hills for copper, and smelt the iron — in short, that they will assert over the land the inventiveness of the human mind, the creativity of the human imagination. Here meekness is defined only in terms of remembering God the giver. "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My

power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth; that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as at this day." (Vv. 17, 18 RSV)

The same theme is written into the story of the creation. "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," God says. What He means by "image" and "likeness" is apparent in the words that follow. "And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth. . . ." God's creative blessing includes the command to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion . . ." (Gen. 1:26-28 RSV). Human creativity is described here as the aim of the Creator, for it is given to men to manifest in their creativeness and control over the earth the very creativeness of God whose breath breathes in them (2:7). It is not a violation of meekness for man to delight and rejoice in a creative achievement of his, in the development of a skill or an art, in his successes in breeding plants and animals, in his inventions in steel and atom, or in his science and technology. Scripture itself speaks of an artist as being "filled with the Spirit" of God (Ex. 31:3). The man who creates fulfills the very first function for which he was himself created.

There are two areas, however, in which dominion has not been given, and it is in the attempt to dominate here that meekness is violated by pride and creative imagination perverted into sin. The most obvious is that he has not been granted authority to subdue God. Its parallel is that he has not been granted authority to dominate

other people. Written positively into the commandments, this principle says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39 RSV). When it comes to people, we are not masters but servants (Matt. 20:25-28), "subject to one another," as St. Paul puts it (Eph. 5:21). This is clearly the opposite of dominating one another. For this the children of God are called because this is the character of their Father. In this quality of meekness they stand right side up in an upside-down world.

It is man in sin who has sought to extend his prerogative of dominion over the earth by usurping authority over God, the Giver, and over his fellowmen. The little child who picks up a stick, which he could fashion into a tool to serve him, and uses it in rage to hit his brother is the perfect symbol of such usurpation. God needs a people in this perverted world who will be meek. Such a people will so trust Him that they on the one hand will want to serve their neighbor rather than dominate him. On the other hand such a people will have the courage to absorb the shocks of those who seek security and life by dominating others, and who thereby perpetrate every kind of sin and injustice. The meek, as the sons of God, are willing to be sinned against, to be dominated, abused, taken advantage of, made to appear ridiculous. This is their calling, and in this they live out the righteousness of their Father.

But the meek are neither cowards nor weaklings, nor are they ever really the losers. The earth is truly theirs, their inheritance. They alone hold valid title to it, a title

conferred by their Father. Nor do they have to fear that what is theirs will be taken away from them. Their Father is alive and alert. He knows what is going on and is quite capable of handling any who by their boasted strength want to assert their claim to property He has bequeathed to His children. For this kind of defense He holds every necessary office. He is at one and the same time the Creator, the Father, the Bequeather, the Superintendent of Documents, the Investigator of Claims, the Issuer of Warrants and Summonses, the Arresting Officer, the Prosecuting Attorney, the Judge, the Prison Warden, the Executioner. There is no need, therefore, for His children to be distracted from their role in the Father's program by personal resistance to such usurpation. They are quite content to give ground, for they know that as long as they are sons of the Father in heaven they cannot be fleeced of their inheritance — no, not by all the devils in hell. But their task is to win the invaders, to save them from their perverted upside-down world, to introduce the enemy to the glory and honor, the joy and security of the world right side up.

This is wonderfully clear not only in this beatitude but in the entire Word and work of Jesus. Security and possession belongs not to the strong and aggressive but to the meek, to the children of God who know and trust their Father. Security is not to grasp for more but to let everything go. There is no need for anxious clinging, for the mad pursuit of more. If you are the children, Jesus would say, the inheritance is yours, and you cannot lose it. Why should you be anxious about food and clothing? Your very life is a gift. Cannot you trust your heavenly

Father, who gave you the life, to give you all you need to sustain it? The birds do not worry about food, nor the lilies about clothing. Yet your heavenly Father feeds and clothes them. Are you not of more value than they? When you, with all your grasping and striving for the security of mammon, imagine that you must assume responsibility for your own life and survival, aren't you thereby demonstrating your fundamental distrust, rebellion against, and hatred of the very God you call your Father? Aren't you thereby meddling in His business, and refusing to believe that you have and will have from Him all the wealth, protection, and security you need? All the earth is yours. So let your Father do the worrying and the giving. Attend rather to the business He has assigned to His children. Seek His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well! (Matt. 6:24-34)

This is meekness, and for this Jesus pleaded as the one right-side-up Person in a world upside down. He pleaded with a rich young man to let go the security of his wealth by giving it all away and promised he would have everything he needed and more besides. "You will have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19:21 RSV). But the man did not believe it and went away sorrowful. Jesus pleaded with the Pharisees to let go their law and their attempt by their obedience to the Law to demonstrate their superiority over other people, to dominate sinners, and to hold God under obligation to themselves. This was their usurpation, and its inevitable corollary was pride instead of meekness. Any meekness they attempted to demonstrate in this context had to be hypocrisy. But they couldn't let it go. They could not trust the mercy of God.

They had a position of strength, built up by hard effort, and they could not abandon the security it offered them.

Nor is it any easier for us today. Once a man has established any fortress at all of his own security by his own hard effort the prospect of forsaking such an advantage appears altogether dreadful. If only we could possess the earth both ways, by inheritance from the Father and by storming it ourselves — that would be the solution! But this, of course, is nothing but unbelief. For to be children means to know and to trust the Father, and to know and trust Him means to believe His promises. It is totally unnecessary to expend energy in anxiety or to find security in such achievement. And to insist on this is to incapacitate ourselves altogether for the kind of life to which the sons of God are called.

And still we are afraid. To be helpless, naked, without weapons or resources? To be utterly at the mercy of God? Horrible! We don't want to be utterly at the mercy of anybody! The image we see is that of the defenders of the Alamo when they have expended their last bullet and there is nothing left with which to fight; or of our home invaded by vicious and crazed criminals who would shoot the whole family without a thought! No, we must maintain some weapon, some last resource, some ace or trump card, even if it is nothing more than a posture of bluff.

But Jesus tolerates no compromises. Anything less than the fullest implications of meekness and sonship is nothing but hypocrisy. There can be no participation in the world right side up for those who insist on the validity of the world upside down. "Whoever would save his life

will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25 RSV). He taught it. He insisted on it. He lived it. He died for it.

For where was His own security? He had no houses, took up no collections, opened no savings accounts. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20 RSV). "Give us this day our daily bread," was His prayer, and that was all the security He needed for this body and life.

His goal was not security but the work for which His Father had sent Him. He had come to walk right side up in an upside-down world, to take the risks and bear the consequences. This He called His "food," "to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" (John 4:34 RSV). He had to endure the sins of the upside-down world and bear in Himself its hatred against God in order to save that very world and turn it right side up. Therefore He suffered abuse without retaliation, insult without a word of bitterness or vengeance.

This was His meekness. But it was not weakness, and even His mighty enemies knew it. He may have looked weak as He hung there, helpless in the anguish of suffering and pain of death. Indeed, what is weaker than a dead body laid and sealed in a tomb? Yet what strength was His! Never a compromise, never a concession to deceit or distortion, never a knuckling under for the favor of men or in fear of suffering! He was strong in His meekness, strong in doing the will of His Father — so strong, in fact, that He compelled them to crucify Him. They

had no alternative. They could not bear to let Him live and convict them any longer.

His strength was in His heavenly Father, His security in His identity as the Father's Son. He knew that the promises of God would not fail, that the gates of hell were being stormed in His very life and death, and that those gates could not resist Him. He knew that He Himself would not be the loser even though He submitted to every disadvantage under the strength of men and under their deceit, treachery, and hypocrisy. For those whose security is in themselves lose everything finally, but the Son, who trusts the Father, inherits the earth. He did indeed! "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev. 11:15 RSV)

Security is to trust the Father. If God is our Father, why should it be so appalling a prospect to throw ourselves utterly on the mercy of God? Are we not His children by our baptism? Is not this the very security of a baby, that he is in the hands of his parents? I weigh ten times as much as our baby, Nathan. I have sufficient strength to swing him by the heels and toss him over my head. Yet when I pick him up, he is not afraid. I am his father, and my strength is no threat to him but his very security. Why do we cling so frantically to our paper defenses, which in the end are no defense anyway? What is the devil of unbelief that possesses us? One thing is sure. Until we trust the Father and find security in Him, we cannot serve him. You cannot serve God and your own survival; you cannot serve God and mammon. (Matt. 6:24)

Are we then to quit working? Must we cash in our insurance policies, close out our savings accounts, and empty our pantries and freezers? Not necessarily. It is possible to see all these things properly if one is turned right side up. Then they are the product of the very imagination and foresight and creativity by which we fulfill the image of God and honor our Father. This, of course, changes everything. When we are upside down, they are the instruments of our security and evidences of our strength; when we are right side up, they are the gift of the Father and evidences of His grace. When we are upside down, we are compelled to hang on to them because they represent our hope and safety. When we are right side up, we can let them go, for we have quite another hope — the promises of our Father and our status as His sons.

Indeed, it may sometimes be necessary for us deliberately to surrender such advantages. The point of Jesus' demand on the rich young man that he sell everything and give it away, was that his riches had become his idol; they were destroying him and turning all his obedience to the commandments into hypocrisy. Similarly Jesus insisted that the Pharisee give up his hope in the Law, that Judaism give up its confidence in Jerusalem and the temple. They had turned these instruments of religion into the idols of their ambition and security. This is the point of His very remarkable saying, "If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and

throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8, 9 RSV). The earth cannot be possessed by those who grab for it, or kept by those who take it by violence. It belongs only to the meek, the sons of God, who have it by right of inheritance as the gracious gift of the Father. To have it in any other way than this, is to destroy the relationship of sonship which is the highest glory of man.

Life on this earth has validity in itself. But life here is at the same time a training ground in the art of trusting the Father and letting go the world. One day your Father will say in finality, "All right, now is the time. Come, let it all go." On that day some will cry out in fear, desperately trying to have security in this earth, to be strong, to hang on, to save themselves. They will not be able to save anything. But the true children will gladly let it go. For they cannot lose their inheritance.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

4

AMBITION

AMBITION

(Up-
side
Down)

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied," Jesus promises.

But the upside-down world, as usual, offers an alternative far more practical and attractive, "No! Rather, blessed are those who are satisfied with their righteousness, for there are more important things to hunger for."

1

Faith is to trust the Father and to find dignity, joy, and security in nothing more than knowing Him and being His son. This is in a sense a very small thing, as Jesus suggests in comparing it to a grain of mustard seed (Matt. 17:20). The big thing is not faith but the grace of God, the cross of Jesus Christ, the invitation and the promises He offers us. When a man has been honored by an invitation to dinner, he does not say to the host as he leaves, "Aren't you glad I came?" He says, "Thank you so much for inviting me." For faith does nothing to prepare the banquet or to deserve the invitation. It is only the response that accepts what is offered. Faith is

the least of it. We praise God for His gifts, not ourselves for receiving them.

Yet the difference faith makes is amazing. Our very theme implies this, for faith means to be turned right side up in an upside-down world. This is a remarkable transformation also in terms of the object of human ambition. What is it that men "hunger and thirst for," as this beatitude describes it?

Every man hungers and thirsts for something. If there is a man with no desires, no goals, no hope, he is reduced to animal or vegetable; he lacks an essential ingredient of humanness. The familiar saying, "Where there's life, there's hope," does not merely express man's passion for survival but characterizes life itself. It is inherent in man that he have a goal and that the goal which predominates in any given moment control both his mind and his body in that moment until it is either achieved or temporarily set aside under the distracting pressure of some other more demanding necessity.

The larger goal may be the ambition for a career, for marriage, for a specific creative achievement, or for an ultimate conquest. It is interrupted, however, by a thousand possibilities, each perhaps trivial in itself, yet each overpowering in its demand at a given moment. The immediate goal may be to escape from a difficulty, an embarrassment, a danger, a suffering or sickness, an indignity, a state of depression, even a sense of boredom. A college girl in the dormitory curls up with a book on a Saturday evening. The phone rings for her. When she returns she throws up her hands in joy and cries, "Saved!" She has a date, she is wanted. Though she had been

reconciled to spending the evening reading, now she describes this prospect as the very opposite of salvation. "I thought I was doomed to read this fool book," she says.

We take our children along to the grocery in response to their pleading. Then they want to buy something, they insist on it, they throw the object of the immediate desire into the basket and raise a storm when it is removed. In that moment it is as though salvation depends on nothing more than the achievement of the desire. Joel comes home and wants a scissors. The house is full of scissors, but he can find none. He raises a storm. Nobody likes him unless everybody helps him. He is not supposed to take the cuticle scissors out of the medicine cabinet, but the next morning we notice it is missing. A week later it turns up in some far corner where he discarded it once he lost interest. Sarah's life will be wrapped up for the moment, for long moments in fact, in paper dolls. Let no one thwart her then, ask anything of her, or clean up her mess by throwing heaps of paper indiscriminately into the waste basket. The cry "He smiled at me!" or "He talked to me!" can express consummate glory for the teenager — at least for that moment. The absorbing passion to win a game may exclude all else while the game is in progress.

Life is a sequence of trivialities, a thousand goals, a thousand scraps of "salvation." These scraps, we suspect, are the only "salvation" in which people are really interested. Promises of "heaven," "eternal life," are quite irrelevant, as are also threats of hell. Even long range goals are significant only in the moments in which they really occupy the mind and hand. But the fears and

threats of the moment, the goals and delights of the moment — these determine the life. Man is the center, his life is his own to create and defend, to do with as he pleases. He knows the difference between “salvation” and “doom,” and the burden of such determination as well as of such achievement rests solely on himself.

This, then, is the point at which faith sees the upside-down world for what it is and sets us upright. The continuous stream of dangers to be evaded and desires to be achieved becomes subordinated to one grand hope and identity. The promises are not merely future, they are a present possession. It is an amazing gift — to be the child of God, to have the dignity of sonship, to have it against every accusation of guilt and unworthiness which Satan can devise, all because Jesus died and rose again and by Baptism His death and resurrection become our own. In that identity we are secure, like children in the home who can be quite unconcerned about food, shelter, clothing, and the routine needs of life which their parents provide for them. When we know the love of the Father who sent His Son into the upside-down world to endure all the consequences of our rebellion and unbelief in order to restore us to Himself and bring us to sanity — when we know this, we begin to see the hand of His grace in everything. Life, health, reputation, home, the joys of achievement, deliverance from danger, family and friends — it is all from Him, and all of life becomes a song of praise in remembering and thanking Him.

Therefore we have something new to thirst and hunger for, namely His righteousness. That doesn't mean a series of fragmentary right actions. It means the realiza-

tion to the full of what He intends with our lives. It means following His leading, exploiting to the full our peculiar gifts, recognizing our opportunities as a divine call, and seizing them with all vigor. It means discovering His character, and growing up in it as we become in heart and spirit what He is, so that the upside-down world can see the right-side-upness of God in us. It means to live out our high identity as His sons day by day in the confidence that, as we express our identity in everything we do and as we fill full the capacities of the life He has given, He both uses us as the instrument of His will in the world and at the same time brings to completion that life of our own which He has created and redeemed and is still in the process of creating and redeeming. For everything we do and experience in relation to Him on any one day becomes part of ourselves and of our equipment for what He calls us to do the next. To desire in life nothing more than this is to desire of life everything God has to offer. This is the hunger and thirst for righteousness, and it carries the promise "They shall be satisfied." Such a life will not be thwarted.

2

If faith makes the goal of life different in those who are turned right side up, it thereby also transforms the whole concept of the enemy and the nature of the battle. In a rare moment of agreement, the two worlds would concur in the proposition that life is a battle. But there would be no agreement on what kind of battle it is, who the enemy is, or with what weapons it is to be fought.

In the world upside down, man's hunger and thirst

is directed to the immediate object of his desire and to the immediate escape from anything inconvenient, painful, or uncomfortable. Just as he knows no purpose beyond his own, so also he knows no way to achieve it except by himself. If we can call the goal, whatever it may be, "salvation," then it can be attained only by personal effort.

This determines the concept of the enemy. The enemy is anything or anybody that resists a man in the achievement of his goal. Sometimes the enemy is a "thing." If a man sets his heart on a picnic and then torrents of rain thwart him, he is helpless, of course. The only thing he can do is invoke the curse of God against the weather by saying "Dammit!" Sometimes the enemy is his own clumsiness. He hits his thumb instead of the nail with the hammer. There is nothing he can do about it, for the action is irretrievable. He can only invoke the wrath of whatever God there is against this enemy and say again, "Dammit!" Sometimes the invective becomes personal. If a careless driver almost hits him and it is only by alert but desperation measures that he avoids an accident, he may be tempted to slam into the enemy just to show him. But his instincts have already stopped him from this, so the best he can do is say, "Damn you, can't you drive a car? Why don't you watch where you're going?"

Such examples are crude, but they are illustrative of the enemy. If we want admiration but find ourselves slandered, the enemy is the perpetrator of the slander. Immediately we fight back, probably with the very weapon used against us. For, we say, "Nobody can talk like that

about me and get away with it!" If a man seeks a promotion, his enemy is the man who might possibly get the promotion instead, and he must now employ every skill to win the eye of the boss for himself, and to distract any favorable attention the boss might pay to the competitor. If a girl regrets that she is not better looking or better liked, she comes to regard with real enmity those who have what she so much desires. On the surface she is polite and respectful, but behind their backs she is vicious and catty. She knows her enemy, and she has chosen her weapons. What is sin, after all, except what we employ when no legitimate device will serve the purpose to overcome the enemy and so to preserve ourselves against threats of loss or to attain the desired goal?

Therefore when I become irritated with the mess Sarah has abandoned after hours of cutting out paper dolls and sweep the whole business arbitrarily into the waste basket, suddenly I am her enemy. She screams and resists to protect that in which she has invested so much energy, and in doing so is utterly disrespectful of her father. Monica has not played with a certain doll for three weeks, but when Rachel picks it up she wants it. "It's mine," she says, and Rachel replies, "I had it first!" The war ensues, they are no longer sisters but enemies, and the weapons are screams, pulling, pushing, and kicking.

Where do we get this tooth-and-claw life, this tension of battle and bitterness of man against man, these hatreds, grudges, jealousies, lusts? They are the inevitable by-product of the system in this upside-down world. For every man sets his own goal, fixes his heart on the achieve-

ment of it, regards it as a matter of life and death, is compelled to do it himself (for who ever really cares more about anybody else's goal than his own?), and must therefore overthrow anyone who stands in the way. And if God Himself steps in with His warnings, wrath, and judgments, then God becomes the enemy — the supreme enemy, in fact, who has the power to unite all mankind at least in a common opposition to Himself.

In the world right side up things are altogether different. The old battle is beside the point because the goal is different. We hunger and thirst for righteousness. But this goal is not of our own determination. Our hunger for it is nothing but our joyful concurrence in the purpose of God. In that case we do not fight alone, for it is God's own battle in which we are engaged, and all the resources of God work with and in and through us. He supplies the weapons of righteousness, both for the defensive and the offensive battle.

The concept of the enemy also is radically shaken. The enemy is not people, for it is never people who stand in the way of our fulfillment of righteousness. Nor is it the uncontrollable events that thwart our immediate objective. In fact, we know that both people and things are under the control of our Father in heaven. There is only one enemy who stands between us and the goal of righteousness. We know him as the devil. He has a thousand and one tactics to employ against us, but fundamentally his objective is one — to make us forget this goal, deny or doubt our identity, and distrust God's promises. The devil is a master at painting righteousness in the blackest of colors, so that the very prospect of doing the Father's

will is dreadful in its consequences. He knows well how to make the desires and goals of our upside-down flesh so luridly attractive that we will leave the way of sonship and righteousness in the pursuit of his phantoms. He is diabolically clever as he paints a picture of life which makes the promises of God appear ridiculous. He takes the evidences of hardship, depression, and suffering, magnifies them as he summons us to feel sorry for ourselves, and says, "God isn't even alive! If God were God and you were His child, He would not let such things happen to you! Forget the word of promise at your baptism, this empty religious fakery, and be practical. There is no life except what you create, no goal except that which you set for yourself, no resources for the battle except those of your own mind and hand." But if we are faced with shame and guilt as those who have dreadfully fallen short of God's high expectations in us, how quick he is to argue, "God hates you! The promises may be there, all right, but they are not for the likes of you!"

This is the enemy of righteousness. Against him Jesus fought His gigantic battle. His enemy was not people. The Herods, the Pharisees, the priests, the Romans — none of them really qualified. He would not fight to overthrow them. When the time came, He even gave them the victory over Himself which they craved. He was their enemy, they were not His. In the end He could pray, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). He wanted to save them still — that's why He had come. But the enemy was the devil. Satan argued with Him that His hunger in the wilderness was a denial of His status as Son and that He should act

to save Himself. Satan offered Him all kingdom and glory (Matt. 4:1-11). Satan made the prospect of suffering appear stupid and ridiculous through the mouth of Peter (Matt. 16:21). Satan urged Him to come down from the cross and show those mockers who was right (Matt. 27:39ff.). In all of it the devil wanted to distract Him from righteousness, from fulfilling His sonship, from remembering who He was, from trusting His Father. The devil failed. Jesus trusted the word of sonship and would not let the promises go. He suffered the loss of everything — everything except this that He was the Son and that He lived out the purpose and will of His Father even to the death. Men who made themselves His enemies He forgave. But Satan He overthrew, with all his deceits and lies. In His resurrection He raised up the new world, the world right side up, and made that world ours.

Here is our righteousness and victory. For this we also dare to lose everything. "And take they our life, Goods, fame, child and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won; The Kingdom ours remaineth," Luther sang. Jesus Himself gives us all resources and courage for the battle when He invites us to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven . . . Lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil [perhaps, "the evil one"]." (Matt. 6:9-13)

Thus there is no need for the righteous sons of God to employ the weapons of violence, deceit, slander, disrespect, dishonesty, or any other shameful device against men. They know the real enemy and how he is to be fought — by meekness, forgiveness of men, willingness to be the loser in this world's battles. They know where their dig-

nity, hope, strength, and victory lies. They will not let go the Word of promise, nor forget their Father, nor walk unworthy of their holy name and calling.

3

If the difference between the two worlds shows itself in terms of goal and of weapon and enemy, it shows itself finally in the outcome of the battle.

If you want a life of frustration in the pursuit of glittering ghosts, try unbelief. Reject the righteousness and sonship Jesus offers, and dedicate yourself to the ambitions and desires of the world upside down. Make it your goal to seize all advantages and to avoid like the plague all sufferings. Only know that no promise of filling is attached to this unbelieving hunger of yours.

There are two possibilities, of course. Either you will get what you pursue for the moment or you will not. If you get it, you will find that it is not all it seemed to be, that the satisfactions of self, however alluring, turn into a bore. Always you must have more, but the more you get, the less you enjoy — like the alcoholic or dope addict or professional adulterer. In fact, that which seemed such a delight may even turn to hurt and destroy you. If, on the other hand, you do not succeed in grasping what you pursue, or in escaping from what you flee, you will feel dreadfully sorry for yourself, as though all that is life and salvation has been denied you. You will look back on a life of dashed hopes and dreams, of unending battle and frustrating defeat.

In either case a third thing will happen. Some day you will have to face up to the fact that this thing you

never hungered and thirsted for, this thing you dismissed as irrelevant, is pretty important. On that day the question will be, "Am I righteous? Do I please God?"

You will try then to dismiss the question as silly, but it won't disappear.

You will try hard then to become nothing. All your life you wanted desperately to be something, but now suddenly you would gladly become nothing. You will hope, you will find arguments to justify the hope, "Death is simply the end. Man is nothing but an animal and dies like an animal." But it won't do. You are not an animal.

Or you will try to wriggle out of it by saying, "I didn't ask to be born." All your life you assumed that your life was your own to do with as you pleased. Now suddenly you want to escape all responsibility for it, as though it were God's fault that you existed and failed to become what He intended.

You will pose as a philosopher. You will be modern, reject all superstition, bring your fears into the open, analyze them sensibly, and talk them away. You will insist there is no God, but you will be saying it precisely because you want it to be so, that there is no God.

You will argue that you have indeed been righteous after all, that you must please God.

You will sweep all your sins out of sight, under the rug, but the rug will begin to move and squirm under your feet.

You will find a few good works to put on the mantle like trophies and polish them up as well as you can. You

will even go out and buy a few more, so that you can reassure yourself by looking at them.

You will compare yourself with other Christians and demonstrate statistically that your life is certainly no worse than theirs and better than most.

And then you will become a theologian. Never did you concern yourself with knowing God, but now you become an expert in theology as you argue indignantly against the very thought of a God who sends anybody to hell.

You will hate God for refuting all your arguments, for being so uncompromising, for simply being.

But all of it will be no good. Faith and unbelief are the difference between two worlds. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6)

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled," Jesus promises. But to the world upside down belongs the corollary of judgment. "Cursed are those who hunger and thirst for anything but righteousness, for they shall be empty."

Faith is so little a thing, the "nothing" of simply doing the obvious, taking God at His Word. The history of the cross proclaims that Word, as in your baptism it becomes your own history. All of life is a gift, everything for which men in the darkness of unbelief must strive is for you already given. You are the son of God. You do not have to ask, "Do I please God?" Your status of dignity and honor in the family of the Father does not depend on your achievements but on your birth into His promises through Baptism.

When neighborhood children come into our yard and begin to do violence to the toys of our own children, I finally lose patience and send them home. When my own children do similar violence to their own toys, I may have to punish them in some way, for this belongs to the calling of a father. But I do not send them out of the yard. They belong there, it is their home by right of birth. They are mine.

So God washes us clean day by day and brings us to maturity as He must, but He does not disown us. He shares with us His vision, His goal for this world, and rejoices as we live out our character as His sons in righteousness.

It is hard to imagine two worlds more different than these two — the world right side up and the world upside down. Faith may be so little in itself, yet for each child of God that faith which says "Yes" to the promises makes all the difference. And if any man will reject all this, let him at least not argue that it doesn't matter.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

JUSTICE

JUSTICE

(Up-
side
Down)

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." But the upside-down world replies, "No! Rather, blessed are those who have rights, for they shall obtain justice."

I

In the world upside down, justice is the ethical ideal. This is inevitable. It is in the nature of things that men do battle for their dignity, their joy, their security, and their ambitions, as we have seen. In this battle it is every man for himself. Conflict is inevitable, but conflict cannot go on forever. If one force is stronger than the other, it will prevail, and the weaker must slink away either utterly suppressed or plotting how to return with greater strength. If the two forces are reasonably equal, they will battle to exhaustion, and finally in the mutual inability to conquer the other will reach some settlement. If such a settlement is violated, a third force must be summoned which can enforce the settlement of the violator.

This is how God, who maintains His rule over the upside-down world even though He is neither known nor

wanted, turns the very sin of man into a force that restrains sin and makes order possible. We call it government, and the settlements we call law. The third force operative in the creation of such law is the collective conscience, the sense of right, of that portion of society which, since it is not involved in a particular conflict, can judge it dispassionately. This conscience is also of God. Men recognize, therefore, a divine authority in their basic law and in the enforcement of the restraints which make possible what we call civilization. The battle continues, but the battle is now governed by rules enforced, presumably, by the disinterested.

We may see this sort of thing happening as we observe our children. I recall the day we had bought a bicycle which had to be the joint property of Sarah and Monica. The inevitable happened very quickly. Both wanted to use it at the same time. The battle was intense. As a father I had two options. The first was to let them fight it out to exhaustion and see whether they would reach a settlement on their own. The second was to intervene. I chose the first, but when the bicycle itself began to suffer violence and when it appeared that their energies for the battle were inexhaustible, I stepped in.

"It's Sarah's bicycle on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; and it's Monica's on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays," I said.

The war was ended — until Monica asked brightly, "Who gets it on Sunday?"

"On Sunday it's Rachel's."

Thus order was established. The children readily con-

sented to the principle on the basis of justice and rights. Justice meant equal rights, but to preserve the equality which justice demanded, the right of the bicycle on Sunday had to be withdrawn from both of the combatants.

Thus men project their goals and do battle for them. But when the goal is unattainable, they settle for justice, that is, for equal rights. Justice, therefore, is already a compromise, a state of truce. Nevertheless, it has a great virtue, namely, that men everywhere in this upside-down world are compelled to pay homage to it. It is the ground upon which peace can be attained and preserved, high-tensioned and unsatisfactory as that peace may sometimes seem. It is the basic principle of civilized society. It is a gift for which God is to be praised and which is to be cherished and enforced with all zeal. But as we have suggested in all of this, it is necessitated by and indigenous to the world upside down. It is the best that world has.

There are two ways in which the principle of justice, noble as it sounds, betrays its affinity to the world upside down. One is that justice comes to be understood as meaning sheer equality and that any deviation from equality is subject to attack as unfair and unjust. Children are amazingly sharp in their capacity to detect this kind of unfairness. My wife and I are convinced that they keep books on how much time and attention we give to each of our nine — so ready are they to feel left out and unloved in comparison with a brother or sister whom they suspect of being a favorite. Everything must be equal. That's why we must be careful. We cannot yield to the desire of one without being subject to immediate pressure

from eight others for similar consideration. Justice is the order of the day, the "ideal" constantly enforced on us.

So it is in society. Men are quick to identify justice with equality, and to extend the equation (especially if they themselves stand to gain by such extension) into every possible area. It is not fair that some should be rich and others poor; that some should be talented and others slow; that some girls should have all the beauty while others are plain or even unattractive; that some should have all the luck while others never in their lives win anything.

We are compelled, therefore, to do all we can toward eliminating every inequity. The principle of democracy is that in the voting booth all men are equal. That one man has spent hours hearing the arguments and thinking through the issues, that another pulls levers at random since none of the names mean anything to him, that still another has no concern for the long range good but only for his immediate personal advantage — none of this matters. The vote of each counts equally. The jumbo egg is granted no more space in the frying pan than the pullet egg.

In education that kind of "equality" is unenforceable. Here we can talk only of equality of *opportunity*, for there is no way to make all pupils equal in their capacities. In the area of wealth, however, there are strong forces which in the name of fairness seek equality of distribution and hold all superior wealth suspect. The communist dream is the extreme of such justice, for it sees "paradise" in the principle, "From each according to his ability to each according to his need"; and "hell" in the basic

injustice (meaning inequalities) of capitalistic society. The basic ideal of equality of wealth is a current of thought accepted by millions in our day, even apart from communism itself, and it is on the popularity of this line of thinking that communist leaders can set their hope for ultimate victory of their system.

Cosmetic and soap advertisers can play on the feelings of inferiority with numerous variations on the theme "You, too, can be beautiful." Equality is again the dream to be realized! A sociologist friend has predicted to me the ultimate solution of the race problem. "In a hundred years we will all be tan." All problems are resolved and paradise is attained when everybody becomes like everybody else. The geneticist projects his dream of a race in which heredity is controlled, and men are specifically bred for various functions, like cattle and chickens. Here is the attractive solution to all problems. Here is justice, here is equality.

The argument is always equality, and the validity of the striving for equality is the principle of justice. We recognize, of course, the high strain to which justice is subjected. There is something terribly unrealistic in all of this. People are not alike, and the moment they are not alike, they are also not equal. The jumbo egg has to take up more space in the frying pan than the pullet egg. God has not created humankind on an assembly line with interchangeable parts. He has not feared to offend us by making us different, each a custom creation. This is our glory, the capacity of each person to be a unique, unrepeatable "self." There is something obviously upside down about a world in which everybody is dissatisfied

with being himself, everybody wants to be somebody else, and everybody in complaint and self-pity promotes in the name of equality, fairness, and justice, his right to be something he is not.

This business of promoting and claiming our "rights" is another problem area in connection with the principle of justice. We do not need the Declaration of Independence to inform us of our "unalienable right" or of the duty of government to ensure and secure these for us. All of life's battles are justified in the name of rights.

When we are insulted, we find ourselves declaring indignantly, "She has no right to talk like that about me!"

A child's voice screams, "Give me! I had it first!"

When prosperity strikes, we accept it as a right. "It's about time I got the breaks!" Or, "I worked hard for everything I have."

In adversity, on the other hand, it is hard to see any justice whatsoever. "Why did this have to happen to me?" "What did I do to deserve this?" "Where is God? Isn't He supposed to be the defender of justice?"

In every case the idea of justice and right is pre-supposed. In every case justice is on our side, the great ally and supporter of our own private claim.

This is, of course, deceitful. It means that every man is concerned still about his own advantage. Personal advantage remains the primary objective. He is then ready to employ that holy and respected thing called "justice" in support of his desires, and thereby to win the sympathy and support of the disinterested "third party" for his cause. Justice becomes a noble gimmick

toward getting his own way. A classic illustration would be the cliché in the Western television show or movie when the villain stands beside the sheriff as the hero is about to be hanged and says, "I only want to see justice done!"

This is a high and clever art in the world upside down. Sarah used to have an aggressive spirit when dessert was being served. She did not hesitate to say, "I want the biggest!"

Her brothers and sisters, of course, reacted with the same kind of indignation the ten disciples showed against the two who boldly laid claim to the highest places in the Kingdom (Matt. 20:24). "Sarah, that's being selfish," they would say — and, of course, they were right. Justice was against Sarah, and she stood condemned.

Not long after we noticed that Sarah had come up with a new tactic. Observing that the larger portion was served to Bethel, she said, "Aw, that's not fair! Bethel's got more than me!"

Now justice was clearly on her side! She had turned fairness into an ally in her cause, though the basic selfishness had not changed in the least. Therefore we parents have been compelled to develop to a high perfection the art of cutting every piece of cake to exactly the same proportions, so that there is no discernible difference whatsoever. What we wanted to give our children in love we are now compelled to give them in justice.

Thus justice has become the ally of selfishness. We forever look up toward the man who has more and in the name of justice claim the right to have what he has.

But when it comes to the man who has less than we do, we always find some way to show the justice of the advantage we hold. It is easy to prove we had it coming. Even the thief can justify his crime by justice. "What did the fool leave the keys in his car for? He was begging me to steal it!" A liar lies to protect his rights. And the criminal who has enough money can hire lawyers who will use every device of legal justice to thwart justice.

The principle of justice and rights also kills thanksgiving. It is easy enough, of course, to learn and to teach the polite formality of saying "Thank you" when this is appropriate and expected. But true thanksgiving is a response of the astonished heart to an act of favor which is altogether free, unexpected, undeserved, and upon which no claim of rights can be pressed. This doesn't happen very often in a world dominated by the notion of justice and rights. The wounded resentment of a child who was not invited to a birthday party betrays the assumption that he had a right to be invited.

We sense this most strongly in the celebration of what we call "Christmas." Let parents try to ignore all the secularization of this season and have no tree, no giving of gifts, no lights and ornaments — and the neighbors are sure to burst in with the question, "Is there something wrong? Can we help?" Christmas has become an obligation in our culture, and the children understand this quite well. They tear open their gifts with never a thought of a thank-you until they are reminded. For isn't this expected? Do not parents, godparents, and grandparents owe it to them to have a gift under the tree? The day after Christmas we urge our children, "Sit down now

and write a thank-you letter to godmother." But they resist, procrastinate, and will not. On January 1, and again on January 15 we repeat the request. Finally in mid-February we undertake the task ourselves. "Dear —, Paul just loved the — you sent him for Christmas, and was so thankful. . . ."

All of this perversion of justice proceeds from the fundamental assumption that we have rights. It would not occur to us to question this proposition, and indeed, relative to the upside-down world in which justice, for all its weakness and perversion, is the most necessary arbiter in the smoldering warfare of man against man, we must operate on this premise. Though it may be argued that no man had the right to be born, still, once many men have been born, the argument is neutralized by the very universality of its application. Once they are here, they must have equal rights in relation to each other. Like eggs in the frying pan, each man needs to occupy a certain amount of space, and that very need becomes a right. But the right of each is limited by the rights of those around him. No man has the right to encroach on the space another man needs for himself. On this ground we assume we have rights. If we are at all religious, we assume also that the highest purpose of God is to defend our rights against encroachment, for nothing is nobler or more sacred to men than rights and justice, and God must be on the side of the noble and the sacred. The final implication is that to get our rights is to be blessed. Thus we have formulated the beatitude of the world upside down, "Blessed" are those who have rights, for they shall obtain justice."

There is a basic instability in all this, however, for it implies that there is no other world than the upside-down one of our experience; that there is no other God than that God who conforms to the upside-down world. In terms of that conception of God, a man will offer a prayer of modest humility, "Look, God, I'm not asking for any special favors or advantages. All I want is a fair shake. Just give me what's coming to me."

Suppose this prayer reaches the ear of the God who refuses to be turned upside down by the upside-down world, but insists on staying right side up, and demands that the world become again what He is. That God will answer, "Rights? What are you talking about? Didn't I create the world and you in it? Didn't I give you life, and breath, and every blessing of survival and strength as My free gift? What do you mean, 'Rights'?"

And our friend will answer, "Sure, God, and don't think I'm not grateful. But we have to be practical. I've got just as many rights as anybody else. I've tried to live a respectable life and I've worked hard. Don't You see that You are not treating me as well as some other guys? Can't You at least give me a fair shake?"

But God answers, "If it's rights that you are so concerned about, when are you going to give Me Mine? I have a right to all your praise, your love, your heart, soul, strength, and mind. I have a right to your entire life of service and obedience. When will you give Me what is Mine? But you withhold your mind from Me and use it to devise schemes for your own glory and advantage. You withhold your service from Me and serve

even men only for what you yourself hope to get out of it. You are a schemer and a fraud.

"So you want your rights, do you? You want to get what is coming to you, do you? You fool! The only thing you have ever earned in your whole upside-down life is My anger. The only thing you have coming to you is death and hell!"

See what a horrible prayer it is men offer when they pray to get what's coming to them. This is really asking for it! If God gives the upside-down world what it deserves, if He acts as the God of justice that the world wants Him to be, the end can only be wrath. There is no justice in heaven — thank God! In heaven there is only mercy.

2

Into this upside-down world God sends Jesus to walk right side up. Jesus utterly rejects the notion that the hope of the world can rest in justice. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," that is His beatitude. A clear and full statement of the alternatives is preserved in Luke 6:36, 37. "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned." Thus Jesus rejects the notion that justice is the hope of humanity on the ground that it can end only in the condemnation of those who set their hearts on it. "Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. . . ." Both forgiving and giving transcend justice, for they are acts of freedom without expectation of return. They belong to the new world of mercy. The appeal to enter that world, to be turned right side up, lies in the cry, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

Jesus in His person and work brings the mercy of the Father visibly into the upside-down world. By definition this means that God gives and loves because that is His nature, not because men have a claim on Him or are deserving and lovable. There is no place for bargaining, for negotiation, for arguing claims. The justice of God as the upside-down world understands the term can only be condemnatory. The hope of the world lies solely in His mercy and therefore in the relation of sonship to the Father with its corollary, the surrender of any kind of relation in which the claims and rights of justice can play any role whatsoever.

This is clear already in the fact that Jesus came at all. There was no reason whatsoever why He should come and why the upside-down world should not be abandoned to the consequences of its own character. Not the rights of men but the eternal grace of the Father and His pity for the lost world stood behind the miracle of His coming and all its implications and consequences.

But we can see the world of mercy unfolding in His whole history. It is obvious, for example, that He never gave "justice" to men. His forgiving and healing was always a response of free mercy, for who could ever have paid for it or asserted any claim or right to it? When the disciples urged Him to retaliate with vengeance against the hostility of a Samaritan village, He rebuked them (Luke 9:51-56). When the injured party in an inheritance squabble asked Him to use His influence in adjudicating the matter, He soundly rejected the notion that His Messianic office should involve Him in the battles of upside-down men over their supposed "rights." "Man, who made

me a judge or divider over you?" Immediately He saw through the shallowness of such an appeal for justice and revealed the basic covetousness which is so ready to use justice as its ally — a covetousness just as plain in the injured party as in the brother who had somehow succeeded in bilking him — also, we may presume, in the name of justice. "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:13-15 RSV)

As He did not give justice, so also He did not demand it for Himself. He never asserted His rights or complained that He was not getting a fair deal. If anyone could have asserted such claims, He could have, since He was the Son of God. The devil pressed just this point. "If You are the Son of God, it is not right that You should be hungry. If You are the Son of God, You ought to make a grand entrance from heaven, as it were, into the temple, borne by angels. You ought to lay claim to all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (Matt. 4:1-11). But Jesus did not belong to the upside-down world and would not consent to its assumptions. He was right side up. Similarly, all the injustices of His trial and crucifixion could bring forth from Him not a cry of self-pity or protest, not a whisper of an appeal for justice, or for vengeance on those who killed Him. Why not? Because He, as the Son of the Father, lived in the world of mercy and would not leave it. He did not even ask for resurrection as a right earned by His obedience but trusted His Father's promises for it. In death He cast Himself completely on His Father's mercy. "Into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

To the upside-down world this is astonishing, unbe-

lievable. We think of God as the defender of justice but find that this vision and ideal only condemns us. Then in Jesus we find what the mercy of God has done — that at the very moment in which all hell should break loose upon us the complete unobligated freedom of the divine love wants us, enfolds us, reconciles us. It is no cheap or arbitrary love. It is fearfully expensive. It is a love which violates everything we would call justice. It is just not fair that the innocent should die at the hands of the guilty and that God should permit it, much less want it, to happen. It is not fair that He should step in the way of the destruction that ought to fall upon us and bear it Himself. Yet God does not want to deal in fairness. He has determined to pay the price, so that as He is right side up, and as Jesus is, so we also may be merciful "as your Father is merciful!" (Luke 6:36). "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

When a man has seen this, the light of grace dawns on the whole world and everything begins to look different. Claims and rights are seen as the shadowy illusions they represent. Everything takes on the new reality of mercy. Life, food, clothing, friendships, achievements, pleasures — all are nothing but gifts, freely poured out by the Father who loves His children, wants them to know Him, to be like Him, and to share His work.

The effect is the inversion of personality. Now there is real joy in the Father, the genuine astonishment at His blessing which is the ground of true thanksgiving. Now there is contentment with the self God created and with the gifts He chooses to give. Now insults can take nothing

from a man because he knows he possessed nothing anyhow. His rights cannot be violated by those who, in the passion for their own achievement and advancement, encroached on his territory by cheating and by every form of injustice. Rights cannot be violated because, joy of joys, he had no rights to begin with. Nor can he be hurt by the apparent violation because, joy of joys, he is the son of the Father, and the Father has an unbelievable abundance of gifts still to bestow. Therefore forgiveness becomes possible against him who did the hurt — a forgiveness which not merely ignores the sin and shakes it off but loves and wants to win the prisoner of the upside-down world to the freedom of the world right side up.

Now it is possible for the man who knows the mercy of God and lives in it to break down those fearful barriers which men raise against one another in the name of justice and rights — the barriers of prejudice, of race, of cultural and social differences. Superiority and inferiority become meaningless when the grace of the Father is acknowledged as the source of what every man has. It does not hurt to suffer loss in stooping, without the least spirit of condescension, to the oppressed, the suffering, the sinners, the outcast and despised of the world, the unloved who so desperately need to be loved and wanted — to lose oneself in order to minister to their need and to be the instrument by which the gifts of divine mercy can break through to them. We no longer fear the threat of personal disadvantage. We become the merciful, for what we receive we give. The character of the Father, of the world right side up, possesses us — and how desperately the world upside down needs to feel and to expe-

rience this as its true hope and its new and unbelievable possibility!

Thus life is set free from the frantic pursuit of and concern for justice, free to fulfill the purposes of God. We, like Jesus, can give more than justice can ever give. We can take the risks and suffer the injustices, for the merciful bounty of our Father will never cease. We can love people quite apart from whether they are lovable, or nice, or clean, or even grateful. We can bear the brunt of the world's unfairness without losing the joy that is ours in mercy, the dignity and honor that is ours in sonship, and the hope and purpose that is ours in our call to do His will and to shine with His light. For Jesus rose, and we are shareholders in His triumph.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

6

WISDOM

WODSIM

(Up-
side
Down)

Our Lord Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

But the world upside down continues its resistance. "No! Rather, blessed are the sharp of mind, for they 'can't see' God."

1

"What man can dream of he can do." As a declaration of the creative capacity of man this familiar proposition has the endorsement of the Creator. The gift of dominion over the earth, which is Scripture's own first definition of "the image of God," invites and summons man to just this kind of activity. He is to dream, imagine, present to his mind a desire, however wild it may at first seem. He is to work it over in terms of all resources of earth that are available to him. He is to experiment, analyze results, build new dreams on the fruits of the old, and finally turn what was once pure idea into concrete reality. Twenty-five centuries ago the Greeks were telling the story of Icarus. He made himself wings of bird feathers held together by wax, jumped off a cliff,

and launched successful flight. But when he flew too close to the sun, the wax melted, the feathers were dislodged, and for his presumption he was dropped to death in the sea. In our century the dream of Icarus is routine reality. The creative imagination of man, no matter how daring it may be, is no presumption in the view of the Scriptures. All creativity starts with a dream, and as a proper exercise of dominion over the earth, man, the marvel of God's creation, eventually turns the dream into reality.

In the upside-down world, however, this adage is more than a descriptive statement of man's creative capacity. It is a basic confession of faith, indeed, of all the faith which that world knows. It expresses the confidence that whatever the problem, human intelligence will in time find a solution. It assumes that in the process of realizing dream after dream, man proceeds on an inevitable climb upward. Creativity is not, then, simply an expression of the character of man. It is turned into the instrument of his hope and salvation.

Our age is dedicated to the glorification of man. "What man can dream of he can do" is the exultant cry of confidence, born of past success and promising infinite progress. The triumphs of agricultural method in America, extended worldwide, promise overwhelming abundance for a world population far larger than the present one. Continued successes in application of atomic energy promise eventually to turn this earth into a paradise. The fearful killers of mankind, cancer and heart disease, are retreating before the host of researchers wrestling with them and will surely be conquered — perhaps in only

a handful of years. Television communications satellites will shortly bring into being worldwide networks. Man is preparing to set foot on the moon, and with the development of atomic rocket propulsion there is no limit to the potential of his voyaging in space.

As man progresses, God is driven into retreat. One after another the phenomena which once overwhelmed men with awe of the supernatural have yielded to rational explanation. There are no more mysteries to put man in fear of the divine. Darkening of the sun at midday has long been understood as solar eclipse, and the turning of the moon into blood as the refraction of red light through fringes of the earth's atmosphere onto the eclipsed moon. Lightning is electrical. With flashlights in hand there is no need to quail before movements and shadows in every darkened bush. Wind is not spiritual, nor is breathing, but both can be understood once one grasps that air is molecular and has material substance. The light of a fire as well as its heat can be explained as release of chemical energy in the process of combustion. Even the shining of the sun has ceased to be mysterious, now that atomic fission and fusion are understood. The northern lights also are a form of radiant energy akin to fluorescent lighting. With so much already explained, there is no need to summon divinity to explain the mysteries that remain. Understanding may for the time elude us, but eventually it will come, as men sharp of mind probe even further into the secrets of the universe.

It is no longer necessary, or even tenable, to resort to the miraculous in order to account for present reality. The religious theory of creation is not needed, indeed it

gets in the way, as man deduces the past state of the earth out of evidences available to him in the present. Heaven is hardly God's dwelling place, for astronomers have long since exploded the idea of a dome-like, hard "firmament" in which sun, moon, and stars are set, and above which God sits in holy transcendence. Sickness is neither judgment from the divine wrath, nor is it a form of devil-possession. Always there is a natural cause, and once this is clearly determined, a cure or preventive is on the way. The science of man finds universals like "original sin" unworkable and untestable. One must accept man as he is, and understand deviations from the general or normal by analysis and classification of peculiarities in attitude and behavior. Sin is violation of accepted norms, but standards change, and one must suspect absolutes. Besides, what men have called sin is often understandable on the basis of past deprivations over which the deviate had no control. In such cases it is more just and proper to fault the circumstances than the man, and the challenge is to improve his environment.

In all this, religion, though condescendingly tolerated, is gradually relegated to the class of vestigial remains. Nowhere is there any evidence of God. People committed to religious worship may cry to their God to show Himself, as their traditional premises collapse one after another around them, but God does not respond. Those who are honest will finally break with the prison of their outmoded traditions and confess, "I just can't see it!" Blessed are those who find such freedom. "Blessed are the sharp of mind, for they 'can't see' God."

Is this really a blessing? And is it really true that

God is excluded? The arguments may be new, but the boast is as old as history, as is also God's reaction to it. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst Their bonds asunder, and cast Their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision" (Ps. 2:2-4 RSV). Is God laughing? "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds . . ." (Ps. 14:1 RSV). Is this a world of fools, whose real delight in their argument is that thereby they escape the judgment of their own corruption? "Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:12, 20). Are men, in their boasts of wisdom, in reality denying their very humanity and reducing themselves to animals?

God does not allow men the choice of weapons when they so insult and challenge Him. He knows what a tower of Babel this new paradise is which men seek to build for themselves, and He has never lacked means of letting His voice be heard and His judgment known.

In the last decade of the 19th century men boasted of their science, exulted in the durable peace created by their diplomacy, and viewed the future with unlimited confidence. Then came the cataclysm called the World War.

In the twenties pride returned with wealth and confidence of more wealth. Then the depression wiped out the wealth of millions, and the dust bowl of the early thirties added to the ruin.

Men were only beginning to clear the wreckage and rebuild at great expense and with much frustration, when

they found themselves in a second World War. It lasted through six awful years and ended dramatically with the dreadful burst of the atom bomb.

Men rejoiced and had visions of a great future. President Harry Truman in 1948 predicted a gross national produce exceeding 400 billion dollars. Then came Korea.

When that war finally ended in stalemate, men for a time found it impossible to hope. Russia had the atom bomb and the means to deliver it. The dread of atomic destruction hung over the world like a pall. But men have the capacity to live in dread only so long. After a time the dread ceased to be immediate enough to arouse any further emotion of fear, and today men take the prospect of atomic war hardly more seriously than that of Judgment Day.

What does this history mean? Is it telling us that God again and again hammers proud man back into the dust? Is God perhaps shouting at us to see the folly of our pride by discovering in honesty the reality of the upside-down world in which we live, a world which by its very character sets man ferociously upon his neighbor, so that the fuse of war and devastation, men using their creative capacity to destroy one another, is just as ready to be lit as is the temper of the man insulted who resorts to violence in defense of his rights? And if we still cannot see this and with honest ear hear it, are we not "asking for it?" — asking that God turn us loose upon one another again in another furious demonstration of divine wrath? The smoldering of wrath is all around us. It does not have to come from Russia or Red China. It can

come from within our own cities, from racial hatreds, which by grace alone have so far not turned to rivers of blood. It can come from a fearful recoil against the blind confidence of men that human problems will yield before legislation and spending, more legislation and more spending. It can come from directions undreamed of.

Yet men will not learn. Every such catastrophe is quickly forgotten, dismissed as a temporary reversal in the inevitable upward march of man. Evolution must slip now and then, but mankind marches onward and nothing can restrain him. Glory to "mankind!"

Tell that to the man whose feet rotted in the trenches of World War I, or who stormed the beaches of World War II beneath a hail of withering fire, or who wasted away in the prison camps of Korea. "Forget it, it's not important. This is only a temporary setback in the progress of mankind!" Tell it to the man dying of cancer. "Cheer up, friend. In another five years we'll have this thing licked, and then human life expectancy will shoot up into the eighties. Mankind marches on!"

Do you see what has happened in this upside-down world? Mankind is served, and the individual is lost. We pursue the dream of atomic paradise and man on the moon, and the rapture of the dream enables us to forget that we have nothing to say to the man whose life today is unbearable in its despair or in its futility because he has no dignity, no security, no real hope. The Old Testament prophets protested the dreadful sacrifice of infants and human beings to Chemosh and Molech, but when we today sacrifice the present generation on the altar of the

future glory of mankind, no one protests. Man concurs in the judgment of the Scripture that he, apart from God is nothing but dust — “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19 RSV). He is glad to be descended from the ape, and the ape from the primeval ooze; he is glad, so he says, to be the rational animal and to return finally to the mud from which he came. He is glad to be nothing but mind, to analyze everything and enjoy nothing except the pride of his capacity to discourse on what he has analyzed. He cannot marvel, he can only explain. He is a robot, a mechanism, a human machine; and his idol is the “mankind” he serves. His drive is to live up to his billing as the “rational animal.” He has ceased to be a “self.”

But he does not know that “mankind” does not exist. Mankind is a myth, an intellectual generality devoid of meaning. It exists nowhere except in the brain. There are in reality only individuals, and only individuals can have reality. And these individuals don't want to be sacrificed to that idol. Why does the intellectual who negates personality seek an audience for his philosophizing? Why do the very people who confess that they are nothing but animals try to become something, to prove their individual importance, to give meaning to their names by writing books or excelling in some area so that they get their names into the paper? Talk about the future glory of mankind is hypocrisy. What men really want is to be persons, to have a life that means something for its own sake in the here and now. The mind may boast of its broadness in consenting to be animal, but the person in whose body that mind is planted will not consent to the

proposition. The person knows, however vaguely, that a man is more than mind. The person strives for a greater destiny than to be a sacrifice. He knows that there is something upside down about his world.

"Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish." Ours is a lost world, a world which knows no way out of its moral filth, crime, corruption, prejudice, hatreds, scandals in high places, the endless circle, the spending that needs more spending — and yet cannot retreat from the pathos of human suffering and dereliction. Youth are more honest than most in facing the despair — with their profound "So what?" to everything which their world boasts as progress and with their refusal to praise what their world summons them to reverence. Sex is glorified, lust is god, pornography is diversion, and why not? What is there to live for except the bed? God has retreated from human life. He is nowhere to be seen, so obviously He doesn't know or care. The picture of pleasure is the blearyeyed drunk holding the empty glass with the olive in the bottom. Law retreats, compelled to grant the validity step by step to deeds society once regarded as lawless. There is no heart for punishments, only for reform; but nobody knows how to reform a heart, and still less does anybody know what for if man is only animal, only dust after all.

Men talk in glowing terms about the new age that is dawning, has dawned, or is about to dawn. Never listen to that rumor! It is nothing, ever, but more of the same old darkness, the next tower of Babel waiting for the next divine judgment. The upside-down world is upside down still.

2

The wisdom of Jesus is not simply greater than that of the world. It is radically new, built on an altogether different understanding of God and of man. It sets no store by man's mind but goes directly to the heart of what he is, demanding that he be turned right side up. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Those words of promise are also a judgment, a diagnosis. It is not because man is sharp of mind that he cannot see God. It is because he is impure, dishonest of heart. He imagines that his mind is supreme, that he thinks dispassionately about himself in relation to world and God, but he deceives himself. Men use their minds the way they want to use them. The will determines the direction of thought. A man is capable of objectivity only in areas in which he has no personal vested interest. But when he is summoned to react in a situation in which he can no longer be disinterested in the findings of mind, his very will demands that the mind see what he wants it to see. He summons all the resources of his mind to justify his defenses and prejudices. When he faces the question of God, the prejudice to be justified is that things are fine as they are — that the world upside down is right side up, that man is his own God and responsible to no one. The whole history of human prejudice reveals that this is so. What man is in his heart determines what he wills, and his will controls his mind. He can be free of prejudice in his relation to the material world over which he holds dominion. He cannot be free of prejudice when his personal relationship is involved — whether to himself, or to his fellowmen, or to God.

It has always been so. When Adam had sinned, he couldn't "see" God either. He didn't want to. His mind acted quickly on his behalf to devise a covering of fig leaves and to hide behind a tree. Intelligence became the instrument of "not seeing." Ever since Adam this has been one of the great functions of the mind, to justify the grand rebellion which is man's declaration of independence, to console the rebel with proofs that he has succeeded, that he is right, that the world of his devising is a success, that he can still overcome or at least dismiss those evidences which keep screaming his failure. Of course man cannot "see" God! The only God he can see is the comfortable one he creates in his own image, after his likeness — the God whom he can control. This is exactly St. Paul's diagnosis, spelled out in detail in Rom. 1:18-32.

Do we need further instances? When David violated his kingship by using his royal office for adultery and murder, he couldn't "see God" either. He went into hiding in his shame, in his vain attempts to justify himself. He was miserable. Then came the confrontation by Nathan the prophet, the confession and forgiveness (2 Sam. 12: 1-15), and the remarkable autobiography we know as Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgression. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (vv. 1, 10 RSV). "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place?" David asks in another psalm. He answers, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false. . . . Such is

the generation of those who seek Him . . ." (Ps. 24:3-6 RSV). The upside-down world does not seek God, and all its pretended seeking is a lie. The world rejoices at its incapacity to discover God, as a reluctant child rejoices when he is told to wipe the dishes and "can't find a towel."

Judaism in Jesus' day couldn't "see God" either. The case which the Judaists made against Jesus was profoundly rational. He was a "loner." He violated all tradition. He would not cooperate. In consummate arrogance He insisted that everybody stand on His platform. He usurped authority to take in the very people whom the synagog had excommunicated — traitors to the Law like tax collectors and harlots. He took it upon Himself, without consulting anyone, to defy the principles of the Sabbath, the laws of the clean and unclean, and the fastings. He even encouraged others in such defiance. He attacked Judaism at its most vital point, the point of its holiness and separation from sinners and Gentiles, yet in this very point lay the hope of the promised kingdom. He even discouraged everything they had been hoping and building for for generations. Whereas God had promised victory to His people over the nations and the exaltation of Jerusalem and temple, He predicted that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed and that the promises would be taken from the "children of the Kingdom" and given to others.

The Judaists tried to be polite with Him, to withhold judgment. They sent delegations to Him, willing to treat Him as an equal. They asked for His credentials or signs of authority. Was this unfair? Even Moses had the lightnings of Sinai behind him when he brought the

Law to Israel. Yet answers of Jesus were always insulting in the extreme — as though He alone knew the Law and they knew nothing. He gave no sign, insisted He didn't have to. When pressed, He mocked them with the "sign of Jonah" (Matt. 12:38-41), as though to say that if they would not accept Him without credentials, they would have to commit themselves in their opposition by killing Him first before they would have the sign they sought. Their position was altogether reasonable, but He just would not listen to reason! Surely the devil had possession of Him!

To all this Jesus had one insistent answer. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "If you were pure in heart, you could see God and you would need no signs. But you are not pure, therefore you cannot know My Father. All of your religious works are a subterfuge, a garment of your own making in which you want to crash the wedding feast of the Kingdom, but it will not do (Matt. 22:11-14). What you really want is your position of superiority — superiority under the Law over sinners, superiority as children of Abraham over the Gentiles. You want to dominate people, and you turn the Law into the instrument of such domination. It is all hypocrisy, this sham religion of yours, and God's patience has ended. The old garment must go, it is beyond patching (Matt. 9:16). You have used the Law to evade the righteousness of God. You don't want to be children who reflect the image of their Father by manifesting His character of love and forgiveness, by bearing the risks of persecution, by taking the position of disadvantage in the world, by trusting Him for all dignity, security, hope, and joy. You

have no real intention of doing His will, and your opposition to Me shows it. Therefore you will have to fill up the vessel your fathers began to fill by their killing of the prophets (Matt. 23:32). You will have to kill Me, the Son of God."

They couldn't see God. But there were those who could. The leper under condemnation of God and man who found healing in Him — he saw God. The despairing tax collectors who knew well that they had sold out their religion for profit at the hands of Rome, the harlots who deserved to be stoned, the sick and suffering, the devil-possessed who received the benefits of the outpouring of eternal Fatherly mercy in Him — they saw God. They saw Him because they found joy in honesty. They had nothing to defend, no weapons left. The joy of being accepted, loved, experiencing dignity as children of God and of sharing the hope of the Kingdom and life and purposes of the Father — that joy overwhelmed them. They discovered the grace and forgiving mercy of the Father, were transported into the new world, the world right side up. They saw the Father because they were children, heard His voice because they were eager to listen, and learned the joy of entering into conversation with Him in the world right side up. "Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name," they learned to pray.

The battle went down to the heart of man and broke through all defenses. Even reason could not prevail then. When the mind has lost its last argument and knows it, man must either surrender or resort to violence. If he can justify the violence by further rationalization, very well. So the violence was justified, and Jesus crucified.

That is the length to which the Father was willing to go in calling the world to the knowledge of its guilt, confronting it with its hopelessness in order that under the despair of judgment honesty might be born and purity of heart restored.

It happened for many. When Jesus had risen and the apostles proclaimed the judgment inherent in His resurrection on the Jerusalem which had crucified Him, thousands cried out, "What shall we do?" Their defenses were gone, their situation under the Law hopeless, for the very Law in which they had boasted turned on them to condemn them.

Then Peter could answer, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38 RSV). Three thousand were baptized. It was a glorious day, and the angels rejoiced in the cleansing. The Father had what He was after, sons who were pure in heart, who knew Him and whom He knew as His own. Out of the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus the world right side up had become reality.

Not by the mind of man but by simplicity of heart — that's how men "see God." Therefore Jesus prayed, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will" (Matt. 11:25 RSV). God does not have to create spaceships for us or harness the atom. The mind of man has authority to do that. But He does have to rescue men from the self-deception of their wisdom, from the idolatry of intelligence. He will no

more engage in battles of the intellect and of rationality than would Jesus in the confrontation with Judaism. He will not accept the challenge to "prove Himself" to the geologist or astronomer or biologist. He will give no such "signs." For the problem is not of the mind. The problem is human dishonesty and hypocrisy, the impurity of heart under which man summons his intelligence to protect him against the despair and judgment of truly knowing himself. God must damn men in the guilt they refuse to face, so that He may cleanse them by the Water whose saving authority is the blood of His Son. He must purify the heart. He must turn the world right side up.

Therefore rejoice, you who have been baptized into His sonship and life! All the wisdom of this world is yours, yours more than ever now by right of inheritance. All wisdom, that is, excepting only the false wisdom which boasts that what is nonscience is nonsense, which glorifies man and disposes of God!

It is a painful experience to be purified in heart. It is a death, a destruction of the "self-that-was," in order to be raised as the "self" that the Father wants and intends. It is the confrontation of our utter nothingness, in order that we may discover the terms on which we are "everything" to our Father, on which our lives receive eternal validity. It is the release of the mind from the folly of its artificial and evasive search for God. For in Jesus Christ our hearts do see Him and know Him and rest in Him.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

7

PEACE

PEACE

(Up-
side
Down)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God," says Jesus.

But the world replies with its inevitable contradiction, "No! Rather, blessed are those who dictate the peace, for they shall play the role of God."

I

There is no arguing the desirability of peace. We are dealing here with one of the noblest words in any language, with the highest of ideals. Even the world upside down reverences prophetic words of hope like those of Isaiah, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is. 2:4). Similarly, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be

full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Is. 11:6-9)

The longing for peace is in direct proportion to the horror of war and of all human conflict. When civilizations attack civilizations with uncontrolled fury, when men on a massive scale deliberately plot how to annihilate one another, when the objective of all intelligence of men is to inflict a maximum of destruction, misery, and death as the instrument of what they consider their righteous objectives — then all disguises are torn away and the world is revealed in its rawest truth as possessed by demons. Here is chaos and utter waste. What takes years to build crumbles in a moment. We experience it on a small scale in our individual lives. A little child can be terribly destructive of what represents long labor and intensive thought and creativity. It may take hours to repair what is broken in a second, if the damage is repairable at all. Multiply such a sickening moment infinitely, multiply it by mutilated bodies and shattered lives. That is war. We dread it as the climax of all evils, and we long for peace.

War, of course, is not the limit of conflict. Add to the picture the battles and tensions between individuals and families, between a man and his wife, between parents and children, between children and children. Mix in the conflicts and jealousies, the taunting and hatreds that develop in schools or between people thrown together of necessity in their work. Add the rivalries and competitions, the cliques that exclude and the bitter animosities that resent exclusion, the divisions of races and cultures. Throw in, furthermore, the tensions and stresses that arise within people, the depression of spirit, the war that rages

in heart and mind. Even "peace of mind" is seen as an ideal men hope for and yearn to find. We want peace, and life is under fearful strain without it. The exhausted mother, with so much to do and with her children constantly pestering her and getting in her way, finally gives vent to the unbearable irritation, "Stop it! Get outside, all of you! Can't you let me have a little peace?"

We hunger for peace. One method by which we seek it is that of sweet reason. After all, what distinguishes man from animal is his intelligence, so let's be intelligent.

The Cub Scouts were playing ball. Suddenly war broke out. "Foul ball," said Paul.

"It was fair," said Jonathan. In a moment they were rolling on the ground, beating each other up.

My wife, like a good den mother in a moment of crisis, stepped in to pull them apart. "It's not worth fighting about. Shake hands!" They shook hands.

"You were trying to cheat," Paul muttered.

"You're a liar," shouted Jonathan — and back they were on the ground again.

Of course these are young boys. Surely when men are older, wise and mature, then reason will prevail! But does it? Somehow it has not helped much in international politics. Disarmament negotiations have been going on in Geneva for well over a decade. It is altogether reasonable that the nations reduce their armaments. Why should humankind in this enlightened century pour \$120 billion a year into preparation for war? For well over 50 million people the military effort is the sole occupation. Our national debt continues to skyrocket under the burden of

paying for old wars and getting ready for new ones. The \$300-billion debt limit has long been broken. So let's disarm! Even a 10 percent reduction would be an enormous gain! It is so reasonable! But how hard it is to achieve! The suspicions among nations are as deep as those between Cub Scouts. Reason plays at best a limited role in the quest for peace.

So we try the way of force and law. I say to two children who will not give up their bickering, "All right, that's enough. You come in here and sit down for a half hour till I tell you to get up."

"But, Daddy, she . . ."

"I don't want to hear it. Just sit!"

This is the way of police, courts, judges, jails. It belongs to law, rules of the game, referee, and umpire. It employs peace bonds, arrests, and fines. We would love to have something like this on an international scale, a world court, a police force of nations. Yet who would trust such a force? What independent nation would really consent to it if its own interests were involved? The way of force and law helps toward maintaining order, but it is not the final answer to the desire for peace.

There is moral force. "I'm going to tell Daddy," one child says to another. Even more effective is the appeal to the opinion of the peer group. "Do you think people like you when you act that way?" "Why do you shame me?" Moral force plays a role in world politics. The fear of being isolated, exposed, condemned by public opinion, is a great one. Yet the power of moral persuasion is very limited. Self-interest still reaches the

point on many an occasion in which it is compelled to assert itself against everybody. "We're not in a popularity contest," recalcitrant nations will say, as will also groups and individuals.

Or we create peace by sheer individual capacity to dominate a situation. The strong man is king of the hill when no man dares attack him. If one is not sufficiently strong, he may succeed in bluffing, in persuading the potential enemy that he has greater forces than he actually possesses. The risk of all-out war is great here, but the hope is for a truce of necessity, a stalemate of fear — like boxers who cautiously circle one another, keeping their guard up, each hesitant to make the first move in attacking the other. This is the way the international game is played today. America must be strong and alert everywhere in the world. We must think faster than the enemy, develop weapons faster, close every gap. The war is cold, but cold war is the hope of peace.

Whatever the devices are with which the world upside down must operate in the pursuit of peace, they are the gift of God and the measure of His patience. He is not yet ready for hell and the final destruction and will not allow it as yet. He can keep men sweating as they expend long labor for the useless, but He will not permit them to blow up their world. The very suspicions, fears, desires, and challenges so familiar in a sinful race He turns into the instruments of His governing restraint. The world must survive in spite of itself. It must have a degree of peace.

This is not "the peace of God which passes all understanding," however (Phil. 4:6). It is not universal, for

men still go through torments and seek peace finally in suicide. It does not transform lives or change the nature of people. It does not get at the root of the problem.

The root of the problem is the delusion that every man must create his own life and achieve and defend his own worth. Therefore every man values and wants something above peace. He wants to be right, to assert himself, to get his own way. Certainly both Paul and Jonathan wanted peace, but each on his own terms. They wanted the peace that goes to the conqueror, like the great *pax Romana* which found the world at peace because conquering Rome dominated the world and its armies and navies enforced the peace. "Blessed are those who dictate the peace, for they play the role of God." That is the peace men want above all — not the dread quiet of defeat but the revelling of victory.

Certainly the gangster who wants to control the mob in a major city wants peace — but the peace must be that which represents the defeat of his rival.

The communist premier wants peace, but on his own terms. "We will bury you" is the peace he is after.

This is the way of the human heart. A man tosses in his bed at night, unable to sleep for remembering how he was insulted or how he made a fool of himself. He has no peace and wants none. He tries to think what brilliant words he might have used to save himself or make the other guy a fool. He plots how to get even. It is miserable to have no rest, to be filled with indignation and hatred for self and world. But it would be more miserable still to surrender, to admit defeat, to give up the battle. The only blessed peace men know is the peace of success and

victory, a peace like that of the conquering generals returning to Rome, leading their captives, displaying their booty, and marching through the streets to the stormy applause of the admiring crowds! Peace is great, but only that kind of peace.

There, of course, lies the dilemma of the world upside down. On the one hand, we cannot live without people because we need somebody to notice and applaud. We even learn the art of applauding others so that we may be applauded in return. On the other hand, we cannot live with people because we must fight to dominate them. Failing that, we can only withdraw into our private little shells and hide out in the misery of defeat. Either way there is no real peace. Isaiah would call it wickedness. "The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt" (Is. 57:20 RSV). The battle can only continue to exhaustion, to the certainty of ultimate defeat, shame, and death. "There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked." (Is. 57:21 RSV)

2

The peace Jesus brings is a remarkable inversion. It belongs precisely to those who give up the battle and are willing to be defeated. The battle they refuse to fight is the false one of the upside-down world. To that world such refusal to fight appears to be surrender; to those who make the surrender it is the noble strategy of the peacemakers, the sons of God.

This does not mean that Jesus in any way weakens or despises the forces of peace which His Father has built into the world of human conflict. He supports everything

that belongs to government. He pays tribute to Caesar (Matt. 22:21). He will neither start nor condone revolutions, but labels them as the work of false prophets (Matt. 24:5, 23, 24). What He rejects as wholly incompatible with the world right side up is the peace of the conqueror. The sons of God do not use the power of the Father to impose peace on earth like some dictator or like the warden of a prison. The devil offered Him that kind of peace, the peace of absolute supremacy. Worship me, use my ideas and methods, and the kingdoms of the world and all their glory can be yours (Matt. 4:9). Even the Pharisees offered that kind of peace. Show us a sign, convert us by overwhelming proofs of your divine authority, and we will believe and follow you. (Matt. 12:38; 16:1)

There were two ways in which He might have achieved that kind of peace. The first would have been to give them exactly what they wanted, to come to terms with them. But then He would have allowed the battle line to be shifted from the corruption of the human heart and the demand for total repentance and surrender to God to the superficial level of the reasonable mind. He would have allowed the Pharisees to get off the hook, to escape the confrontation with the righteousness of God which condemned them. He would have abandoned the work of salvation. On the other hand, He might have really showed them! He might have given them the sign of Judgment Day, when the holiness of God and the absolute finality of wrath would be revealed, and have robbed them of all evasions and excuses. He might have come down from the cross. But this would have meant their

destruction, and He had not come to destroy but to save. Either way He could have had the peace of the conqueror, the peace of the world upside down. Only it would not have been the peace of His Father.

Jesus' grand name, "the Son of God," is not merely a handle by which He is called and not merely an affirmation of His deity. It is the name that describes His work and character, that defines Him as the "Peacemaker," who lived out and accomplished the peacemaking character and purpose of His Father. The Son is like the Father, and He fulfills and brings to reality the peace of the God who sent Him. Imagine how much easier it would have been for God, if He had created peace for Himself as this upside-down world understands peace! He could have forced men to be good, could have turned them into obedient animals, machines responding to push buttons. Or He could have wiped them from the face of the earth and allowed the ape to be the noblest of creatures in a world whose created nature would never be touched by the hand of man.

But God did neither. His very purpose in creation was to have a son, made in the image of the Father and breathing the breath of the Father's kind of life, a son who would create as the Father created, a son who would know and trust the Father and whom the Father would know and trust. Men in conversation with God, God with men, and men with one another; men creating together a world and a life full of excitement in its never-ending potential of dominion, and expressing that dominion by an infinite variety of creativity; men not afraid of hardships and frustration, men rejoicing in being what they are

and seeking to be something higher only by giving fullest expression to what they are able to become; men rejoicing in one another and honoring one another, and with one heart and voice honoring their Father; men who are free from the false and free for the true — that's what God was after. When He had it, He saw that it was "very good." (Gen. 1:31)

But God lost it. When men had declared their independence of Him, they immediately were split apart also from one another. Eve seduced Adam and Adam blamed Eve. Cain killed his brother, Lamech boasted of his sword, and the Babel builders were forcibly divided. For all this, the Father did not surrender. He wanted His children back home. He became the Peacemaker. To deliver them from destruction He went through ages of agony, governing and controlling their evil, destroying and yet preserving humankind. He did not cease to pour out the benefits of creation even on the ungodly. As Jesus summarizes it in connection with His appeal to Israel as the children of the Father to be peacemakers by loving their enemies and doing good to those who hate them, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45 RSV)

But the son Israel had continually failed. The name "son" had been given to this people already in the Exodus (Ex. 4:22), yet their whole history had testified to their unwillingness truly to be a son, to be right side up in an upside-down world. Israel never became the peacemaker because the peace they wanted was exactly that which the Gentiles wanted — the peace of domination and supe-

riority over others, the peace enforced by the conqueror on the conquered (Matt. 20:25). Therefore God had to send His Son Jesus to fulfill the mission and calling of Israel — to summon Israel to the reality implicit in the name they had borne so long — and to create the peace God was after not only for and in Israel, but for and in the whole world. That was the calling of Jesus, the Son of God.

He took it seriously. He was all alone against the world, but He was not dismayed — for He was the Son of the Father, and His Father was the almighty Creator of heaven and earth. His goal was simple — not to dominate the enemy but to win him back to God. Even in winning him, the goal was not to glory in the number of conversions achieved, but to set the enemy free from the futility of a false, upside-down life with its dead end of despair and judgment, and to set him free for the life of sonship for which God had created and called him. Therefore Jesus had no ambition to control the world. He was not like the dictator who must always live in fear lest some plot to assassinate him succeed and he himself be overthrown; or who must maintain his position by wit and power over people who either hate him or are continually bribed and deceived into supporting him. That kind of peace is no peace, and it was not Jesus' goal. He had come to restore man to God, to transform him from enemy into son, to kill the old upside-down nature that led to death, and to raise up a new creation, the son who would share the mind, will, life, joy, freedom, and peace of the Father. That's what Jesus was after.

His method also was simple. It was a twofold strategy.

On the one hand, He would simply be the Son of God. He would live out in relation to men exactly the character of His Father, so that men would be confronted with what God was really like. They would have to see how God loved and wanted sinners and how far the Father would stoop to wipe them clean and to honor them by putting on them the best robe and killing the fatted calf (Luke 15:22). They would have to see also how God will not compromise with evil or come to terms with hypocrisy; how the truth of God exposes the lies and deceits of men, pierces through the level of mind and the defenses of rationality, and reveals the deathly rottenness and uncleanness of hearts full of hatred and rebellion and inescapably subject to condemnation and wrath (Matt. 23). The God they would see in Jesus the Son is not the comfortable, controllable God they have created in their own defensive imaginations. And the Son of God they would see in Jesus is the very Son of God like whom they, as the sons of God (Ex. 4:22), have been called to be and are not. Unrighteous Israel would here be confronted with righteous Israel.

That was one side of the strategy. The second side was that in this confrontation Jesus would let them have their own way. He would be what He had come to be, but He would also not resist the consequences. He would not defend Himself or stop them from doing to Him whatever they wanted. That's what makes the history of Jesus so remarkable a drama. If men insist on refuting God, calling both Jesus and His Father a liar, they get away with it. They are not struck dumb for the blasphemy. Their mouths are not even taped with adhesive. If they

insist that they are the sons of God, not He, and convince themselves of it by their descent from Abraham and their obedience to the Law, He will expose the hypocrisy, but He will not force them to confess otherwise or to honor Him. If they insist that they can create God after their image, He will warn them but at the same time give them every opportunity to try. They can even formulate their blueprints for the kingdom they desire, and set out by their own methods to create it. He will not stop them.

If they accuse Him of disturbing the peace, if they argue, "Everything was peaceful around here till you came along," He will suffer the accusation and lift not a finger to defend Himself. If they are intent on using their God-given minds to plot against God's Son, if they determine to arrest Him secretly in the dead of night, if they insist that He must die so that they may escape from Him and preserve their precious illusion of righteousness, He will not resist them. If they are driven to such hatred and fear that they say, "If I ever get my hands on Him, I'll kill Him," He will let them get their hands on Him and kill Him. If they argue that He is the upside-down one and therefore He must go, He will give them every chance to prove it. What an opportunity they have to preserve their own world, to get their way, to win their battle, to build their proud Jerusalem, to demonstrate their righteousness and uprightness under the Law, to justify themselves, to create peace by killing the One who destroys their peace!

Yet it all collapses. The conquerors destroy themselves precisely by conquering: The Law they use to condemn Him turns to condemn them as the haters of God who

"fill up the measure of their fathers" (Matt. 23:32) by crucifying God's Son. The Jerusalem they want to set on top of the world and the temple in which they seek their glory and security are destroyed as Jesus has said.

But peace has come. Devils and men have used their last argument in defense of self and in opposition to God, there is nothing more they can do. Reason has failed to protect them, violence has failed to save them, achievement of their purposes has given them no victory. Now the devil is powerless, his kingdom fallen, as the Conqueror of Satan stands in the midst of that great fortress called hell whose gates have not been able to keep Him out. Now the world must know who has triumphed, as Jesus breaks open the tomb, conquers death, and stands alive, as He said, on the third day. The courage of Judaism is broken, and when two former disciples, Peter and John, stand a little later in the presence of the same Sanhedrin which had engineered and voted the death of Jesus, when the courageous apostles confront the crucifiers face to face with their guilt and despise their threats, Caiaphas and his company cannot bring themselves to repeat the act. They threaten, they scourge, but they lack the courage to kill. Their power has been spent and broken. (Acts 4:5-31; 5:27-42)

Now Jesus ascends, and saints and angels welcome Him in His triumph. Now the Father sets Him at His right hand, and gives Him the rule and authority over all creation. Now the world upside down is invited to accept the peace, to lay down its arms and discover the joy of the forgiving God who destroys all that is shameful and evil, who grants a new birth, a new beginning, a new life,

and a new hope — who invites the world, in short, to be turned right side up with the right-side-up Jesus. But it is also the last time. As great as is the opportunity, so great is the judgment to come when Jesus returns in glory to destroy all who despise His cross and cling still to the world upside down.

This is the age of the peacemakers, the sons of God who are not afraid of the world because they know their Father and rest secure in the victory of their Lord and brother, Jesus Christ. With Him they reflect to the world the image and likeness of God. Their strategy is His. They confront the upside-down world with its hopelessness and condemnation by simply being sons, by being right side up. They bring the love and peace of God to the poor, the despairing and depressed, and invite them to the new life. They expose the hypocrisy of a world which refuses to see or acknowledge any evil in itself but rejoices in its boasts. They endure the consequences. They absorb the shocks of the world's treachery and violence without retaliation. They love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, and they do so confident in the divine strategy of the victory of the peacemakers. For they are the sons of the Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:43-48)

How desperately the world needs them!

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

8

CONFORMITY

CONFORMITY

*(Up-
side
Down)*

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Jesus says. Then He expands on this final theme, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."

But the world upside down has its contrary definition of blessedness. "No! Rather, blessed are those who are accepted for being so agreeable, for they sit on top of the world. Blessed are you when men like you, say nice things about you, want you for their leader, and even consider themselves fortunate to know you. Rejoice and be flattered, for great is your prestige on earth; for so men have treated the conformists who were before you."

1

The highest art in personal relations this upside-down world knows is the art of making a good impression. It is not easily learned, for it comes chiefly by trial and error

in the painful process of growing up. It is characteristic of children that they can "give it" but not "take it." They can attempt to assert their domination over others by teasing and pranks, and when they have opportunity in a game to enforce their will on others or make fools of others, they go all out. Yet they react violently against being teased or made the victims of their own games; they try to change the rules, they quit and will not play. They are crushed by reproof — for their superiority in which they gloated is suddenly taken from them. From the "highest place" they have been cast down to the lowest.

Out of such experiences we discover the need for courtesy, for treating others with respect if we want to be respected ourselves. Above all, we learn that if we do want to assert our superiority, we must do so with "tact," respecting human nature, not violating people's self-esteem. In fact, the aim is to turn the self-esteem of people to our own advantage, to exploit it in such a way as to make them like and esteem us. To this end we cultivate the art of the smile, the remembered name, the friendly word, the interested question. It is all part of the grand strategy of influence, whose basic premise is conformity to what people desire.

The game is complex, but three basic rules will get almost anybody off to a good start.

The first is to be liked, to gain acceptance. This is done by artfully building up the self-esteem of other people, by making them feel important and wanted. One may be selective here and concentrate particularly on those whose esteem may someday prove especially desirable, though it is wise to build as broad a base of such

friendships as possible. People who feel generally rejected will do anything later on to support those who have given them reassurance of their dignity and worth. They interpret this as love and compassion, the highest of virtues.

The second rule is to be exceptional, for it is by this that leadership is recognized. One may, for instance, show up at a picnic with a glaringly outlandish shirt or dress. It must be treated as a joke, of course, for then it does not constitute a declaration of independence from the group or an assertion of superiority. But it is a worthwhile joke, for people immediately recognize it as leadership and secretly envy an occasional violation of conformity, so long as it does not become an attack on their own dignity. There are a thousand ways in which this can be done. One may read a book, learn a song, play a guitar, propose a radical idea, win a contest, or achieve a high grade. Any such thing may serve the purpose of being exceptional.

But that leads to the third rule, often the hardest of all to practice, that one must never be too exceptional. Here is the great danger, the rock on which many a ship, carefully built and launched, has foundered. The danger in being too exceptional, as may be learned through much pain, is that one finds himself suddenly isolated from the world. People can give admiration only to a degree. After that, admiration turns to jealousy, and jealousy to faultfinding and cattiness. A man must never give the impression that he believes his own superiority. The moment he does, he is headed for a fall. The situation may sometimes be retrieved by public confession, by find-

ing fault with oneself, but even this is tricky and can be readily interpreted as cringing, whining self-pity. Humor is a good ally at all times, for it testifies that one does not take himself and his achievements too seriously.

People who are successful are generally those who have learned well the strategy of influence. True, there are always a few isolationists who by the sheer worth of their ideas become indispensable to others. They may not be liked, but they are used out of sheer self-interest and even admired. But this is quite a precarious exception and unpredictable. Many another man whose ideas may be equally good only ends up utterly crushed. It is best for a man with ideas to sell both himself and the idea. Indeed, a lesser idea bought is of greater significance than a greater idea unsold. This is no attack on the value of competence wherever possible, but it does acknowledge a certain validity in the adage, "It doesn't matter what you know, but whom you know." "Whom you know" must be understood to include also, "Who knows you."

The successful politician understands all this very well. It is his bread and butter. He knows that to catch the mind of the majority he must sell the people on himself at the points at which their own self-interest is at stake. They must know him as a personal friend and eventually even take pride in being able to say they know him. He must be alert to their mind. If he enters a controversy, he must do so cautiously with his ear to the ground, covering every advance with an escape route in case retreat is called for. He must be flexible and honor every opinion. Once in a while, however, he must

demonstrate also his exceptional leadership. For this he must choose an issue on which a solid majority agrees anyhow and then project himself into the vanguard of righteousness, in ruthless attack on the self-interest of the minority opposition. It pays to have the right enemies. Issues sufficiently far away that nobody whose friendship and admiration is important would have any personal stake afford an ideal opportunity for vision, for patriotic support of the national interest or that of the community of nations. Of course the rule of caution also applies. One must never take one's leadership too seriously or become excessively committed to a cause for its own sake. The danger then is that the leader may find himself suddenly so far in front that he has lost the crowds. Nothing is more damaging for the politician than the accusation that he is "out of touch with the people." Past laurels are a precarious perch.

Thus the blessedness promised by the beatitude of the upside-down world is realized. Man learns to perfection the art of conformity to what the world needs, wants, and secretly admires. So long as he does not lose his touch or is not unseated by someone even more skillful in the art than he is, he will sit on top of his little world.

There are difficulties, of course. Since the world can have only a limited number of leaders, the majority eventually have to settle for the limbo of mediocrity and make the best of it. They can still hope for heaven, but the juices of hope are gradually squeezed out until suddenly, "Pfutt!" There is nothing left but the empty peel of unrealized desire.

Even worse is the situation of those who never manage

to get into the competition at all. By some oddity of appearance, some twist of mind, the sheer inability to compete, or the insensitivity of their particular society they find no acceptance but only ridicule and accusation and impossible demand. It is useless to conform to a world which has already rejected them. Hence they become suspicious of the very principle of conformity and assert their rebellion in disruptive behavior which will shock people into paying attention to them and taking account of their existence. They have nothing in particular to build, no alternative to offer. They are simply in rebellion. Yet the passion for conformity persists sufficiently to drive them into groups or gangs where they conform at least to one another. Here they find the security and respect for which they have hungered in vain. Society is disturbed and irritated, tries to ignore them (but they refuse to be ignored), fears them, arrests them, sends them to reform schools or jails, tries to rehabilitate them. It is a hard task, for rehabilitation means to teach and convince them that the beatitude of conformity is valid; yet for many this has already proved to be an impossible way of blessedness.

Then there are the rebels on the other end of the scale, the tiny minority who, though they would have the capacity to conform, reject conformity in principle as a form of enslavement. They don't want to be like everybody else, for the destruction of genuine personality is too great a price to pay for popularity. They are eventually, and painfully, isolated from society to the advantage of both parties. They want to create, and the less they have to do with people, the better. They harden them-

selves against caring for what people think and go their lonely way. They have no cause except the preservation of self and perhaps the proclamation of the validity of the individual. The world judges them as queer, unsociable misfits and leaves them alone so long, at least, as they don't interfere — so long as the indictment of the world upside down implicit in their very existence does not hit home on any really personal terms but can be viewed with objectivity and dismissed as nothing more than "an interesting idea" with "some germ of truth." These individualists sense that the world is upside down. Perhaps the Lord has His eye on them as He once had His eye on a man named Simon. Perhaps if He met one, He would give him the name "Peter" (Rock), and say to him, "Follow me." (John 1:42)

2

For life in the world right side up is a great adventure, and it calls for heroes. Jesus does more than rebel against the form of the world in which He stands, more than insist on His individuality against that world. His life and word is not merely a protest. He has a cause for which to fight and die, something positive to build. The cause is His assignment, and its defeat is impossible. The cause is to turn the world right side up and thereby to set men free.

His call, "Follow me," is the call to participate in the battle. It is indeed the call to conformity but to an altogether new conformity. Its watchword is "righteousness," which means conformity to the world right side up. Its rallying cry is "on My account," which means con-

formity to Him who brought the world right side up into being and called us into it. Its challenge is to suffer the persecutions, the hatreds, the exclusion, the deaths this world may inflict in defense of its own upside-downness in order to rob that world of its armament and defenses and to deliver it from the fixation of standing on its head. Its promise is blessing, joy, gladness, and the life which has eternal validity.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, . . . it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:10-16 RSV)

No greater invitation or challenge has ever been offered to men. This is a call for heroism, for people turned right side up to cling to that new life of theirs with such joy, and to their Father with such confidence, that they will live out their character as His sons fearlessly against every threat. They will not yield when the pressures rise, for they know the purpose of their life — not to be reinverted

by the world upside down but to demand that that world conform to Jesus Christ and be turned right side up.

The task is, in a sense, greater than that given men originally in their creation. There God said to man, "Have dominion. Subdue the earth." He placed His created son in the midst of creation and said, "This is your inheritance. Now create, and reflect My image." That task the sons of God in the world right side up still have. Their call is to employ every gift of intelligence, imagination, and hand, together with every resource this earth offers, and to be creators in the likeness of God. They have this task as no one else has it, for the earth is theirs of inheritance as we have seen (Matt. 5:5), whereas the upside-down world bears the additional and impossible burden of having to seize the world and then trying to hang on to it.

The new element in the calling of the sons of God is that they must repair the ruins, and this against deathly fear and bitter opposition. For the upside-down world dreads to be turned right side up. It loves itself, trusts itself, cherishes its hopes and methods, and will not see the vanity or confess its hopelessness. Nor will it trust a Word of divine promise or follow a summons from God. It will not surrender the controls nor follow on a path whose end it cannot see with the eye or understand with the mind.

In the world upside down, man has the responsibility to project his mind into the future, and to determine his present actions as wisely as he can in terms of that future. If he takes risks, they must be calculated with the prospect

of immediate gain or the risk of loss. Man has no resource outside of himself and wants none. He will not see the ruin of his world but takes his guided tour through it, looking only at those things which congratulate him and encourage his vanity. He is not simply deceived. He wants to be deceived, insists on it. Therefore he resists truth. He defends his slum and refuses to allow it to be proclaimed a slum and to be levelled so that something new can be built.

The ambassador from the world right side up is unwanted, and the demand lies heavy on him to conform or get out. For the salt of God burns like fury in the open wounds of an insipid and dying world. The light of God's truth and hope can only be interpreted as an enemy by those it blinds, for they have learned to love their darkness and to interpret their darkness as light. "If then the light is darkness, how great is the darkness" (Matt. 6:23). The man who expresses the hopelessness of the world, the dead end of its frustrations and strivings, is accused of pessimism and of hatred of humanity. He will be dismissed as a nut or perhaps accused of alliance with the devil.

The world upside down wants religion but not a religion that demands any changes, not a religion that destroys men's hopes in order to reveal new hopes and new possibilities for life. Everything is right the way it is, basically at least. The world can be improved, but there is nothing wrong with its foundations, its premises, or the direction in which it is moving. Let no one insist too loudly or confront the world too directly with the proposition that this is not so. The only salvation the world

wants is to be declared right! To discover that it is free from sin! To discover that its illusions are reality! To be assured the end of its road is solid and enduring success! To be told man has ascended to deity!

That's why life in the world right side up demands heroism. The cause is God's, the conformity is to Jesus Christ, the goal is make the world see reality in order that it may be delivered from its despair and find blessedness exactly where the world thinks blessedness can never be found. But this means that the light shines and does not for fear retreat into hiding. This means that the salt tastes like salt and burns like salt and does not forsake its character and calling. This means that the city on the hill, the new Zion raised up in the resurrection of Jesus, be visible to the nations so that the great promises of the prophets who saw in Jerusalem the hope and joy and peace of the world may be realized. This means that the citizens of the world right side up walk boldly through the midst of the world upside down and take the consequences of slander, reviling, and persecution. That calls for courage — the courage of the nonconformist, the courage of the man who can stand alone. But it is not merely individualistic nonconformity of which Jesus here speaks. It is a new conformity, conformity to Himself.

For that, as we have seen, is the courage of Jesus, who Himself conformed as the Son of God to His Father's will, purpose, and character. When He was slandered for associating with sinners, for healing on the Sabbath, for eating with unwashed hands, He did it anyway. When He was accused of being possessed by the devil, or of stubbornness in refusing to give a sign, He would not be

bluffed. He knew where the devil was and refused to give an inch or retreat into silence. When all men yearned for Him to concur in the vision of the glory of Jerusalem and to lead them to that glory, He not only announced the destruction of the city, but demonstrated the judgment of God that rested on it by overthrowing the tables and driving out the sacrificial animals on sale there.

As He left the city Palm Sunday evening, He sought fruit on a fig tree, and finding none, cursed the tree. Next morning the disciples saw that it was withered and dead. It was an enacted parable. The fig tree was Israel in its present state. God had patiently cultivated the tree and sought fruit but found none. Now the curse spoken by one man would be the judgment on the whole tree. One man right side up would condemn and overthrow the world upside down! When the disciples marvelled at the miracle of wrath, Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." (Matt. 21:21, 22)

They were about to witness the greater thing, the one man against the mountain. The mountain was all the enmity of men and devils. It was the combined force of Judaism, the Roman Empire, and the armies of Satan. He stood against it alone, and the question was, Who would move? "The sea" stands for the chaos from which all evil comes, as in Rev. 20:10, 14; 21:1. Against that mountain He had no dynamite or nuclear bombs for blasting, no great diesel earth-moving equipment, not even

twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:55). All He had was the Word of His Father and the prayer which united Him with the Father's will and purposes. "Be taken up and cast into the sea!" The mountain would move, not He! What a strange, unbelievable combat it was! What heroism of faith, of persistent conformity to the Father against all opposition! Down to the end He fought with nothing but the Word of His Father — the Word they must hear, the Word He knew and trusted. The salt burned, the light shone in such brightness that the blind had to see and hate it. He was crucified, dead, and buried — and still he won! The third day He rose again from the dead, and the mountain had been uprooted and cast into the sea. The hold of Satan on the world of sinners had been broken. The world right side up had triumphed over the world upside down, not for the destruction of men but for their resurrection with Jesus into the new life of sonship with the Father through His blood.

Jesus wants heroes, men who will so trust the Father that they will let go the whole world and everything it treasures, who in losing their lives for righteousness' sake will find what life really is. In Judaism He found that heroic spirit among the Zealots, the men who passionately believed that God could work victory for His people at the hand of very few. Joshua (the "Jesus" of the Old Testament) had stated the principle, "One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, as he promised you" (Joshua 23:10). Only their cause was wrong and their method for attaining it, for here they were still of the world upside down. They wanted the glory of Jerusalem and believed that

God would work through the sword. With sword in hand Peter could boast of his willingness to die (Matt. 26:35) and actually plunge into the battle (v. 51). It was a real heroism but not yet in conformity with the world right side up. In that world there are no weapons except the Word of God and the prayer relationship with the Father, when Father and son know and trust one another and share one mind and one will. When Peter was challenged to be this kind of hero, he quailed and denied his Lord (Matt. 26:69-75). But after Christ's resurrection and the pouring out of the promised Spirit, he walked right side up into the very stronghold of the enemy. He was not on the defensive, they were. He would not yield, they must — yet not by might of man but by the Spirit of God. That was the spirit of the apostles, a spirit and power which the upside-down world itself was compelled to acknowledge at Thessalonica, "These men . . . have turned the world upside down." (Acts 17:6)

This is the heroism of righteousness. It is heroism without heroics. The world loves heroics. We dream of being heroes, of taking life in hand to rescue a life, or to advance the cause of science and space exploration for the glory of country. Especially we dream of the recognition a hero achieves, the worship of the multitudes who must confess that they would not have been up to it. We dream of the television cameras and the interviews and the headlines and pictures in newspapers and magazines. We even dream of the modest speech we will make through the applause. "It was nothing really. I couldn't have done it without . . ." etc. That kind of heroism is reserved for the world upside down. To achieve recognition finally

after long defeat — it's great, and the hope of it drives men to fantastic efforts. Nor does the Lord grudge them this. "They have their reward," He would say, as He said to the Pharisees, whose heroism lay in the obedience to the Law. (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16)

But the righteous expect no victory parades, no public acknowledgments. They act as they do because they are what they are, not in hopes of what they may become. Every gift of God is already theirs, the life, the sonship, the inheritance. The cause is not themselves but the world that so tragically hates the salvation it so tragically needs. The power is not theirs but God's, and so is the glory. This does not mean that they walk through life in gloom and self-pity, as though they were sacrificing themselves. The only thing that is sacrificed is sin, the upside-down life with all its tensions and demands, its frustrations and futility. These are the children of God who, as they pursue His kingdom and righteousness, receive from Him all that they need and in abundance beyond necessity. They eat with thanksgiving, wear clothing and dwell in houses with thanksgiving, for they recognize in every benefit of life the givingness of God. They enjoy the world, its pleasures, even its riches as the undeserved blessing of the Father. The task of the day is a divine privilege and calling, and the challenge and excitement of creative achievement as well as its fruits is His gift. They are a free people, whose greatest treasure is to be what they are, the children of their Father.

But they are also a courageous people who share the Father's mind and work. They do not have to cling to the world and do not feel abused if the injustice of men

who seek to create their own lives snatches away from them benefits which God had just given. They do not have to despair if they suffer oppression, if affliction and evil befall them, and if they find their lives a desert of deprivation, for the Word of the Father stands. They are His children, and the valley of the shadow of death through which He leads them must itself become the instrument of His purposes. They invite the upside-down world to share their adventure of life and freedom in the character of God which shines in them. They wear faith, their confidence in the Father's care and leading, as a shield. They have the Word of God, both judgment and salvation, as their sword. They destroy strongholds of the proud, warn of the judgment to come, and convey the joy of mercy to the despairing. The blessedness of the world right side up is the joy they share, and for it the world is theirs to conquer.

Therefore they become a reproach to the world. Its goals are futile, its devices are sin, its glory is shame and self-deception, its excuses are escapism, its riches are a usurpation, its rights are an invitation to wrath and death, its wisdom is blindness, its unbelief is deliberate evasion, its righteousness is hypocrisy. The truth of this is revealed by the righteous in life and in word — courageously, for the light exists to attack the darkness, not to defend itself. When the message hits home, the citizens of the upside-down world will flee; and when their escape is blocked, they will finally be compelled either to break down in surrender — so that the angels rejoice — or to attack. In either event, it is a sign of victory for God — “for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

There is no recognition for this kind of heroism. This is courage without display. There is no advertisement, no publicity, no press notice, no hailing of successes. It is a quiet battle and consists in filling life with God moment by moment, day by day, in eager dedication to the work He gives, the opportunities He affords, and the relationships into which He leads His children. Strength comes from the Word and Sacrament, from the regular inhaling of the "breath" or Spirit of God as the community of saints gather to worship their Lord, to remember again who they are, to be forgiven of failures, freed of Satan's accusations, to start clean again, and to strengthen one another in temptation. And when that "breath" is exhaled, they go out again into the world, not to hide or to save face or to make impressions, but simply to be what they are — the children of God, reflecting the character of the Father in truth and love.

They ask their Father to spare them the ultimate crisis, for persistence in the battle can mean the greatest of torments and persecutions. "Lead us not into temptation," they are taught to pray. But above all things they want the Father's will to be done on earth, and they are the doers of it. If that will summons them to let go, for Jesus' sake, everything this world values, they will still not deny their Lord. They are the hammer in God's hand. The Father cares for His tools. They will not turn to rubber just when He is about to strike the decisive blow. They cannot lose the battle. The eternal triumph is already sealed in the victory of their Lord through Baptism, by which He has marked them as His own. In faith and prayer they will stand together if possible, alone if neces-

sary, against the mountain; and they will see the miracle again, as the mountain is cast into the sea.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”